

CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

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INTRODUCTION

No one with a true appreciation of John Calvin's influence upon the world of religious thought can wonder for a moment at the number of students who select some phase of his life or work as a basis for their graduate studies. One is inclined to believe that Schaff has not overstated the matter when he says:

"No name in church history - not even Hildebrand's or Luther's or Loyola's - has been so much loved and hated, admired or abhorred, praised and blamed, blessed and cursed, as that of John Calvin."¹

A student of Calvin and of the literature dealing with his influence upon history does not find it necessary to read very far into this field of literature until he has run upon some statement which proves Schaff's estimate to be amazingly accurate. As an example of the high esteem in which Calvin is held by many, one need only quote a few words from Kuyper:

".....I still hold, that this manifestation of the Christian principle is given us in Calvinism. In Calvin my heart has found rest. From Calvinism I have drawn the inspiration,

¹Philip Schaff: History of the Christian Church, Vol.7, p.270.

firmly and resolutely to take my stand in the thick of this great conflict of principles."¹

This will sound to many as an exaggerated statement but it is only representative of a large host of very sincere people who follow the teachings of the great reformer of Geneva with implicit confidence and assurance. They are attracted to his way of thinking, not merely because they have been instructed in Calvinistic doctrine from childhood's days, but also because Calvin has given expression to feelings and longings which they themselves were unable to express adequately. Calvin speaks for a certain type of mind. His reaction to the Christian religion is typical of the way in which many in every age have reacted and will react to it. His prominence in the Reformation and the definiteness with which he declared himself with regard to spiritual truth, have caused many to rally under his standard with an enthusiastic loyalty.

On the other hand, his enemies have been just as confident that he was sadly in error and just as enthusiastic to discredit his body of teaching. Mark Pattison declares with a vengeance that an

¹Abraham Kuyper: Lectures on Calvinism. p. 5.

"illogical spirit of Protestant tyranny is seen embodied in the person and institutions of Calvin."¹

He also accuses Calvin of

"impressing upon the religious movement a character of despotic control of the understanding, and a spiritual police of the conscience, far more intrusive and impertinent than that against which it had just rebelled.....Calvin appears before us as the too successful champion of intolerance; the promoter of what we know as the preeminently narrow and exclusive theology; as the man who has done more than any other man to deprive Protestantism of its character as a protest in favor of freedom. We see him overthrowing the liberties of the little State which so generously sheltered him; conspiring to put 'a bridle into its jaws'; exiling or shedding the blood of its noblest patriots. We shall hate him personally for his bigotry, inhumanity, vindictiveness; above all, as the author of the great crime of the age- the murder of the heroic Servetus. And we shall conclude, on the whole, with the Ultramontane biographer, Audin, that his career was 'funeste à la civilisation, à l'art, aux libertés.'"²

Those who know Calvin best (and the great majority of this number are his friends,) are continually faced with the fact that he is woefully misunderstood and, along with those who misunderstand,

¹Mark Pattison: Essays, No. 12, Vol. II, p. 5.

²Ibid. No. 12, Vol. II, pp. 5,6.

there is a large number who are surprisingly ignorant of the nature of his teaching. There are multitudes who have merely heard his name, have read a fact or two about his life or work, and, from that meager knowledge, have formed an opinion of his worth to the world. The writer was recently talking to a friend about religious leaders and in the course of the discussion remarked that John Calvin was a great man. "Yes", sarcastically replied the friend, "he must have been - he burned Servetus at the stake." Every good deed Calvin had ever done, every great sermon he had ever preached, and all the remarkable religious literature he had ever written, was passed over in one mighty sweep and Calvin's chief meaning for this person was that he had been influential in having an opponent burned at the stake.

To hear the remarks of others one would think that Calvin's one purpose in life and one contribution to mankind was the promulgation of the doctrine of Predestination. They appear to believe that he originated the doctrine, that he, alone, held it, and that most of his sermons and writings dealt with this subject.

However, both his friends and his foes agree that his influence, both in his own day and since his

day, has been tremendous. His "footprints on the sands of time" are traceable in nearly every country on the globe, particularly in Switzerland, France, Holland, Scotland, England, the United States, and Canada. His has been an abiding influence of great power since his death, chiefly because of the unusual influence which he exerted in his own time. While his significance for our day is by no means so marked as it was for his day, nevertheless he is influential now for practically the same reasons for which he was influential then. Some of the reasons will now be briefly enumerated.

In the first place, Calvin was the author of religious literature which organized and crystallized Protestant thought to an unusual degree. Thousands were breaking away from the Roman Church - a church with well-defined tenets -, and this protesting group soon found themselves adrift and scattered without any definite body of doctrinal matter to which they could anchor their faith and declare their allegiance. There was much confusion and misunderstanding. Everything seemed hazy and many were faced with a dilemma of either Romanism or confusion. Calvin detected this great need. With an amazing rapidity, and remarkably soon after his decision to cast in his lot with the Protestant people, he produced the first edition of

his Institutes of the Christian Religion. This work will be touched upon later. Suffice it to say here, that he gave the Protestant faith a systematic and orderly expression. The people, clamoring for a definite body of beliefs, were presented with just that thing, and it goes without saying that chaos gave place to order; scattered, devout souls became organized; and men found a solid basis upon which to rest their dearest possession, viz., their faith in a living Christ and the Church for which He gave His life. Protestantism had spoken and in no uncertain terms. The banner had been lifted and adherents rallied to it with fortitude and hope. The wandering and distorted ideas of a mighty host had at last found orderly expression in the clear, courageous words of their great leader. Is it any wonder that people naturally looked to Calvin as one in whom they could rest their confidence, and as one in whose voice they recognized the note of authority and leadership for which they were looking?

In the second place, let it be noted that Calvin's influence was greatly intensified by the fervor with which his preaching and teaching was accompanied. Few men of his day could speak so impressively and convincingly or hold the attention of vast congregations so remarkably as he. He himself had passed from

darkness to light. The corruption of Rome was fully realized and appreciated by him. No one having seen what he had seen, and later having been endued with new light and power as he had been endued, could fail to present a challenging message. Anyone hearing him could detect easily that he was no mere teacher or preacher but a seer, a prophet, an herald of sorely needed truth. Many and interesting are the accounts given by his hearers of his gripping messages and manner of presenting them.

Again, let no one overlook the fact that Calvin's so-called dogmatism was the very definiteness for which the people were looking. The Roman Church out of which they had just come was dogmatic to the core. The utterances of the Pope carried the weight of ecclesiastical law. The traditions of the Church took equal rank with Holy Scripture. Error on the part of the Church was considered unthinkable. A dominant note of certainty rang through all they said or did. When, for the sake of conscience, the people in large numbers broke away from the Roman Church, these disorganized and, in many instances, uncertain souls clamored for religious certainty in the new leaders they had chosen to follow and and the new doctrines which they had accepted. In the

Papal fold they had been as simple children, receiving and believing that which issued forth from those in positions of authority. They had been told what to think and what not to think, what to read and what not to read. From this highly organized system they had now revolted; easier access to God they now knew to be possible; personal responsibility was impressed upon them as reality. It is not to be wondered at that many of them felt bewildered, "unequal to these things". Foundations were crumbling; long-cherished beliefs had been shattered; unquestionable authority had been removed from them. Their new-found faith and hope was to them too precious a possession to rest upon a doubtful basis. The only way possible to speak peace to their souls was to sound the certain trumpet, to declare the Protestant principles with earnestness, conviction, and assurance. Not "I think" but "This one thing I know", was the battle-cry for which their hearts longed. This convincing word came to them from Calvin. In all that he said or wrote there was no shadow of turning, no sign of doubt, no wavering in conviction. He inspired their hearts with confidence and furnished them with firm ground upon which to rest their newly-acquired faith. As Dr. Mitchell Hunter has so truly said:

"It was not that he merely gave wide vogue to a system of ideas; he poured into the veins of multitudes a new spirit, inspired their hearts with a new religious passion, galvanised them into a new moral life, and started them in ardent pursuit of new ideals."¹

And finally, perhaps the most important thing that he did was to put the Holy Scriptures in a central and basic position in his religious system. For Catholicism, tradition, as has been said, vied with the Scriptures for this important position. Luther had made many very strange remarks about certain portions of Holy Writ and thereby weakened the faith of many with regard to it. It was left to Calvin to present the Bible to the people as the only book under heaven whose words were a result of "Thus saith the Lord." God had spoken; His word was truth; take ye and read; "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." He helped to translate the Bible into the language of the people. He called himself a "Minister of the Word" and based every pulpit utterance of his upon its truths. As he read its pages he was filled with rare courage, feeling that with this treasured weapon, the Sword of the Spirit, he would gladly meet the challenge of any

¹Dr. A. Mitchell Hunter: The Teaching of Calvin, p. 1.

foe.¹ He expounded its teachings in his Institutes, his Commentaries, his tracts; and every reference he made to Scripture was permeated with the spirit of reverence and respect. He never lost an opportunity to bear witness to its divine origin and heavenly content.

It is because of Calvin's importance to religious thinking, and the central place which he gave to the Bible in his thinking, that the subject of this thesis has been chosen by the writer. Perhaps there has never been a time when there was more discussion of the Bible, its authority, its trustworthiness, its historicity, etc., than at the present time. Scores of books are issued from the press annually which deal with these and other problems connected with the Book of books. Newspaper and magazine articles are frequent reminders that the people in general are interested in the subject. Higher criticism, an age of science, the widespread distribution of knowledge through better educational facilities, the ease and rapidity with which the news of current happenings reaches all classes of

¹"This language (Gal.i.8,) not only exhibits, in an impressive manner, the majesty of the word of God, but yields, also, a powerful confirmation of our faith, while, in reliance on that word, we feel ourselves at liberty to treat even angels with defiance and scorn." Commentary on Galatians, p.33.

men, and the marvelous workings of the wireless, have all caused men to reconsider and reexamine many of the things which formerly they had accepted without question and taken as a matter of course. It is with a belief that Calvin has something real to contribute to much of the confused thinking of our day that this thesis is undertaken.

The subject of this thesis will be treated under four heads: first, Calvin's doctrine of Scripture will be considered in its various phases; second, we shall see in what way Calvin's doctrine of Scripture affected his other doctrines; third, the relation of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture to other men and movements will be looked into; and finally, the writer will endeavor to make a fair appraisal of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture.

Calvin's own works have constituted the chief sources for this study, since it is his own view of Scripture in which we are particularly interested. However, the opinions and estimates of others have been given due consideration. Research work has been pursued in the libraries at Edinburgh, Princeton, and Yale; inquiry made in person as to books by and on Calvin in the Library of the British Museum, the New York Public Library, and the library of Union Theological Seminary, of New York City; and inquiry made by correspondence to

the Presbyterian and Baptist Seminaries at Louisville, Kentucky, the Louisville Public Library, and the Congressional Library at Washington, District of Columbia. It is to be feared that Calvin is not studied as he once was, or as he fully deserves to be studied, since the writer found it necessary to cut many of the pages in the books consulted.

The task has not been an easy one since it is only in rare instances that Calvin has written with the express purpose of declaring his views on the Bible. On the other hand, however, practically everything he wrote is honey-combed with appeals to Scripture and assertions as to the value and source of the Bible. These references afford one an unmistakable evidence of the way in which he regarded the Scriptures and, therefore, it has been necessary to go through the majority of his works and discover these references, many of them being hid away in the most unexpected places. The study has been the source of an immeasurable blessing to the writer, not only in learning more concerning the subject in mind, but in having his eyes opened to truths about nearly every topic of spiritual import. The period of study closes with a far greater admiration for Calvin than that with which it was begun, and an assurance that Calvin still is able, even in our modern times, to

contribute much to our spiritual welfare.

Appreciation is especially due to Rev. Prof. H. R. Mackintosh for his guidance, sympathy, and suggestions, and to Dr. A. Mitchell Hunter for his readiness at all times to render assistance in and out of the New College Library, his deep interest in the problems of every student with whom he comes in contact, and the light which his book, The Teaching of Calvin, has thrown upon the subjects with which this thesis deals.

PART I

CALVIN'S VIEW OF THE SCRIPTURES

Chapter I.

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

The fact of greatest importance to John Calvin was the fact that God had revealed Himself to mankind. This fact could never be treated as prosaic or commonplace by him. It had power to grip the heart, stir the mind, and quicken the imagination. It was a fact over which he delighted to ponder and, each time his thoughts centered around it, he was filled with unspeakable joy and enthusiasm. Such a realization added fire to his message and caused him to form an irrevocable determination that all his strength should be devoted to the task of making it possible for all men to hear the words which God had spoken, and learn the truths which He had proclaimed.

Calvin believed that all men, at some time in their lives, in some way, are conscious of God's existence. This consciousness is a gift from God, that no man might be able to "shelter himself under the pretext of ignorance."¹ This knowledge of God, be it clearly understood, was not acquired through seeking on man's part. There was first a disclosure on God's part which

¹Institutes I.iii.1.

endowed every man with a deep-seated desire to know more about the Divine Presence of whose existence they were now conscious.

God had wonderfully revealed Himself in nature, but, because of sin and ignorance, men lacked clearness of vision and keenness of perception, and God therefore bestowed upon them a clearer revelation of Himself:

"God reveals Himself.....more clearly (than in His works) in His Word, which was in the beginning revealed through oracles, and which was afterward committed to writing in the books which we call the Holy Scriptures."¹

Mortal eyes may fail to read the majestic account of God's glory presented by springing flowers, singing birds, flowing brooks, and starlit heavens, but no man could remain ignorant of His glory when the knowledge of it was set before him on the pages of an open Book. God had spoken to divinely appointed men who in turn had recorded what they had heard from Him and, therefore, all could share in the heavenly wisdom so graciously imparted to a chosen few. The chosen few had passed through experiences which were awful, tremendous, and fearful. The majesty of God had been felt.²

¹Art.II, French Confession of Faith, prepared by Calvin et al.

²"All this tendeth to show that He importeth no dreams here, but that it is the very testimony of God, which must be received with authority. And hereby we see that in all the

Calvin believed that God, by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit, had seen to it that this revelation of Himself should come to us in all its purity and trustworthiness. The men to whom God revealed Himself and His message were not left to record their impressions in their own way and according to their own ideas, but God had taken every precaution in the matter that He might be able to guarantee to every individual seeker after divine truth the privilege of reading the exact words of God. Theirs should not be an indirect approach to the Father's message but direct, first-hand, a personal experience. Calvin was quite satisfied that the reader of the pages of Scripture would profit by what he read only to the extent to which he believed in its heavenly origin:

"When that which professes to be the Word of God is acknowledged to be so, no person, unless devoid of common sense and the feelings of a man, will have the desperate hardihood to refuse credit to the speaker. But since no daily responses are given from heaven, and the Scriptures are the only records

visions which the ancient fathers had, God did set certain tokens to amaze them, and to put them in some terror and fear, which served to authorize His Word, to the end it should be received the better. For we see how men are not so well inclined to hear God speak as they ought to be, except He make them to feel His majesty." Sermon on Job iii.12-19.

in which God has been pleased to consign His truth to perpetual remembrance, the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognized, unless they are believed to have some from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them."¹

Calvin is not always consistent in his teaching and therefore one sometimes finds statements of his which are not in entire accord with the above quotation. However, we must remember that he was human and that his writings fill many volumes, and even if everything he wrote is not in perfect harmony with the above, the great body of his teaching is in complete accordance with it.

The inspiration of the Scriptures meant far more to him than the matter of a mere influence being exerted on the inspired writers. It was a process whereby God breathed into their hearts and minds the exact message which He desired them to record. Of course, God's inspiration was not confined to the words of Scripture. He inspired men other than the writers of Scripture, but in a very different sense. The inspiration which He gave to these chosen scribes was a special and exalted type of inspiration which was reserved for the production

¹Institutes I.vii.1.

of Holy Writ:

"We have already said that the word of God comes in two ways to men. God addresses all from the least to the greatest; but in the first place He sends His word especially to His Prophets to whom He commits the office of teaching."¹

Also:

"God addresses His word also indiscriminately to others, whomsoever He is pleased to teach by His word, but He speaks to and addresses His Prophets in a peculiar way, for He makes them the ministers and heralds of His word, and puts, as it were, into their mouth what they afterwards bring forth to the people..... for the Lord did not simply address the Prophet in a common way, but furnished him with instructions, that he might afterwards teach the people, as it were, in the person of God Himself.....God then spoke in Hosea, or by Hosea, for he brought forth nothing from his own brain, but God spake by him.On this, indeed, depends the whole authority of God's servants, that they give not themselves loose reins, but faithfully deliver, as it were, from hand to hand, what the Lord has commanded them, without adding anything whatever of their own."²

One might say that Calvin's entire doctrine of inspiration is summed up in the foregoing quotation. He was not willing that any other book should be given the reverence and respect which he believed was due the Bible.

¹Commentary on Minor Prophets, Vol.I, p.16.

²Ibid. Vol.I, pp.42,43.

The difference between the inspiration of the Scriptures and the inspiration of other books, was not only a difference in degree but distinctly a difference in kind; God addressed His prophets in "a peculiar way." This was to Calvin a matter of vital importance, and he declares his contention on this point with marked vigor. He could see in this belief a truth which placed our religion on a plane all its own. It makes it unique among all the religions of earth:

"This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whosoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him, first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the law and the prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit."¹

There was no such word as "compromise" in Calvin's vocabulary. If he discussed his theory of inspiration, he did it vigorously.² When he came to put his theory into concrete terms, he took an extreme view. That he held to a dictation theory of inspiration, there can

¹Commentary on Minor Prophets, Vol.I, p.53.

²"Calvin affirme l'inspiration de l'Ecriture. Personne ne l'a affirmée plus énergequement que lui." Doumergue, "Jean Calvin," Vol.IV, p.72.

be no doubt. In fact, he spoke of the apostles as "authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit."¹ They merely recorded the exact words which fell from the lips of God without any addition or subtraction. It would be possible to multiply quotations, almost without number, from Calvin's works in which he not only implies that God dictated the very words of Scripture but actually uses the word "dictate." These quotations are not confined to any particular section of Scripture but may be found in almost all his Commentaries:

".....the doctrine herein contained was dictated by the Holy Spirit for our use, and confers benefits of no ordinary kind on those who attentively peruse it."²

"The Holy Spirit, who dictated this prayer, saw well that Satan would not suffer David to live in peace...."³

"First of all, the matter itself shows how Daniel did not speak from his own discretion, but whatever he uttered was dictated by the Holy Spirit."⁴

"For who can be a more certain or more faithful interpreter of this oracle, which He Himself dictated to Isaiah, than the Spirit of God, as He has expounded it by the mouth of Paul?"⁵

¹Institutes IV.viii.9.

²Argument to Commentary on Joshua.

³Commentary on Psalms: Ps.xx.6.

⁴Commentary on Daniel, Vol.I, p.79.

⁵Commentary on Corinthians: I Cor.ii.9.

Not only are passages of Scripture delivered to men directly from God but individual words are singled out by Calvin as words deliberately chosen by the Holy Spirit for especial use. His doctrine goes beyond the general to the particular. Verbal inspiration is boldly declared. Instances of his belief in this type of inspiration are to be found in many of his works, (Commentaries on Psalms xviii.45, xxiii.1, lxxiv.1, Genesis xxxix.6, Isaiah ii.8, and in his Institutes I.xiv.5.) These, and others, leave no one in doubt as to the full import of his doctrine. These two quotations are representative: Quoting I Samuel xvi.7, "Man sees what appears outwardly; but God looks on the heart," Calvin adds:

"There the Holy Spirit expresses the same thing by 'heart' as He does here by fidelity or 'truth'."¹

"But, according to the mode of expression in the Hebrew language, by the use of the term 'foolishness', he acknowledges that he had been out of his right mind, when he obeyed the lusts of the flesh in opposition to God. The Spirit, by employing this term in so many places to designate crimes the most atrocious, does not certainly mean to extenuate the criminality of men,.....but rather charges them with maniacal fury, because they wilfully fly in the face of their Maker."²

¹Commentary on Jeremiah v.3.

²Commentary on Psalms: Ps.xxxviii.5.

His Commentaries and Institutes are full of instances in which he mentions the Holy Spirit as the speaker in passages of Scripture. In practically every case, the words referred to are the words of the author of the book. Words of the author of Exodus, the author of certain Psalms, of Paul and of others, are referred to by Calvin as words of the Holy Spirit. This merely bears out the frank statements which he has made all along concerning the nature and source of Scripture, viz., that God is the Author and the apostles and prophets merely his amanuenses. Twice he speaks of the Holy Spirit thundering forth His decrees. Once, (Institutes I.xi.2,) he says that under certain circumstances it is not strange "that the Holy Spirit thunders such responses from heaven;" and again, (Institutes I.xi.4,) he declares that the inroads of sin upon mankind, individually and collectively, had become so evident that "the Spirit at length thunders forth a dreadful imprecation." Calvin not only recognizes the words of Scripture to be the words of God but also hears with his spiritual ear the very accents and word emphases of the Almighty. He "thunders" forth His truth; He "distinctly says" other things, (Institutes I.xviii.2.;;) He has "loudly asserted" still further facts, (Commentary on Ps. 1.16;) He "justly rebukes" the foolish and sinning

ones, (Commentary on Ps. xiv.1.) Calvin has no hesitancy whatever in embracing a doctrine which he believes to be taught by Scripture, because whatever words he finds in Scripture, are, of course, to him the direct words of the Holy Spirit:

"As to myself, I am certainly not ashamed of speaking as the Holy Spirit speaks, nor do I hesitate to believe what so often occurs in Scripture, that God gives the wicked over to a reprobate mind, gives them up to vile affections, blinds their minds and hardens their hearts."¹

In most instances, Calvin loses sight of the human element in Scripture altogether. To him, the passage could not be the Word of God any more surely if the Holy Spirit Himself had literally taken a pen in hand and written the very words. As he comments on various passages, he uses the same phrases and modes of expression which a person would use in relating to another the contents of a letter which he had received from a friend:

"The Spirit of God makes mention here of another species of danger in which God manifestly discovers His power and grace in the protecting and delivering of men."²

¹Commentary on Harmony of Pentateuch: Ex.1v.21.

²Commentary on Psalms: Ps.cvii.10.

This is by no means an exceptional quotation. Like references are abundantly available.¹

If these forms of speech occurred only occasionally, one might be justified in thinking that probably Calvin used these forms unthinkingly and that they crept into his manuscript while his mind was occupied primarily with the content of the passage, but their frequency precludes such a supposition. In fact, we have, on the other hand, not uncommon instances in which he deliberately corrected himself if he felt that he had not done justice to the doctrine of inspiration which he so tenaciously held:

"I now return to the design of Moses, or rather, of the Holy Spirit, who has spoken by his mouth."²

"They who suppose that the prophet, or rather the Spirit of God, uses too many words, are not well acquainted with themselves."³

"This order and connection did David observe, or rather the Spirit of God, who meant by the mouth of David to instruct the whole Church."⁴

¹Gen.xx.2; Commentary on Psalms: xx.1; xx.7; xxii.31; cxxv.3; cxxvi.4; cxxix 4; cii.14; cxiii.1; cvi.31; Isa.xxx.1; xxxix.6; Jer. li.24; and Institutes IV.xx.11.

²Argument to Commentary on Genesis.

³Commentary on Isaiah xiv.26.

⁴Commentary on Acts, Vol.I, p.64.

These words of Calvin, and others¹ which he uttered from time to time, leave us in no doubt that he felt honor bound, as a witness to the faith which was in him as touching the Scriptures, to leave no stone unturned in making himself perfectly clear as to his belief in the origin of Scripture. It was not enough that he should adequately explain the passage in hand, but he was assured that he must use no word, or group of words, that might give his readers the impression that he was not firm and decided on the doctrine of verbal inspiration. He was strictly conscientious in the matter. His was a double responsibility, viz., that of being an expositor of spiritual truth, and that of bearing witness constantly to the nature and source of Scripture itself. The message of Scripture was of great importance, that was true, but it became tremendously more important when one knew it to be a message directly from God. A conviction of this kind worked in two directions: first, on Calvin, by making him extremely zealous to declare the scriptural message and declare it accurately; and secondly, on the people, by causing them to search the Scriptures and to utilize every provision which had been made for a better understanding of them. Calvin's

¹Commentaries on Jeremiah xxxvi.30 and Psalm lxxxvii.3.

attitude was contagious and the reader of his works instantly "caught" his enthusiasm for and devotion to God's Holy Word.

As for the prophets and apostles, they were merely mouth-pieces of God. The message came from "that Spirit, whose organs the prophets were."¹

"Nay, when the Spirit, by the mouth of Paul, foretells, in distinct terms, that a defection will take place,.....why do we spontaneously walk blindfold to our destruction."²

It was even conceivable that they did not realize the full import of what they wrote and, especially in the matter of foretelling future events, they only saw through a glass darkly;

"For these servants of His, to whom God intrusted the office of prophesying, He so directed by His Spirit, that they never spoke except out of His mouth. And although they did not foresee all that was to happen, but only according to the measure of their revelation, still He concealed nothing from them which it was profitable for them to know. Hence the expression of Amos, 'Surely the Lord will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets,' (Amos iii.7.) In a word, they were the organs of the Holy Spirit for all necessary predictions; and the credit

¹Institutes I. xiii.7.

²Ibid. IV.ix.7.

due to their prophecies was of an equable and constant character, so that they never spoke absurdly or in vain."¹

All through his Commentaries on the Psalms we are faced with expressions similar to one of the phrases used in the foregoing quotation with regard to the prophets speaking only "out of His mouth." The Holy Spirit "directed David's tongue," (Ps. viii.1;) "put into the mouth of David" a certain form of prayer, (Ps. xvii.8;) and "expressly warns us by the mouth of Paul," (Ps. xxxiii.2.) In fact,

"They dared not....announce anything of their own, and obediently followed the Spirit as their guide, who ruled in their mouth as in His own sanctuary."²

It appears, according to Calvin's doctrine, that inspiration was a passive procedure as far as the prophets and apostles were concerned. To use a modern illustration - they were simply wireless receiving sets. God spoke into their spiritual ears as an announcer would speak into a microphone at the broadcasting station, and their hands wrote and mouths spoke, like the reproducing horn of the receiving set, only the words God had spoken.

¹Commentary on Harmony of Pentateuch: Num.xxii.5.

²Commentary on Catholic Epistles, pp.390,391.

However, though the human writer plays a very insignificant part in the production of Scripture, he is not lost sight of altogether. Sometimes Calvin gives him a bit of recognition by mentioning his name, but nearly always with the implication that he is under the controlling power of the Holy Spirit:

"David sets this truth before himself for his own comfort; but we also may draw from it doctrine very useful in training us to the fear of God; for the Holy Spirit, by declaring God to be the avenger of wickedness, puts a bridle upon us, to restrain us from committing sin, in the vain hope of escaping impunity."¹

Again:

"Paul terms the prohibition of marriage a doctrine of devils, (I Tim.iv.1,3;) and the Spirit elsewhere declares that 'marriage is honorable in all,' (Heb. xiii.4.)"²

Occasionally, Calvin mentions only the human writer but one is almost inclined to believe that these instances are occasions of oversight on his part. For instance, in speaking of the "miracle by which God restrains the violent and tempestuous ragings of the sea, that it may not overwhelm the earth," he writes, "Nor does Moses forget to mention this in the history of the

¹Commentary on Psalms.

²Institutes IV.ix.14.

creation" (Commentary on Ps.xxiv.2.) It appears on the surface that we are indebted for this historical allusion to the memory of Moses. Nevertheless, this quotation must be interpreted in the spirit of the whole trend of Calvin's teaching with regard to Scripture. No one statement, or group of statements, of this kind can outweigh his very decided and direct witness to his belief that God spoke every word of Scripture. If one should question what Calvin would do with direct quotations from Satan in the Scriptures, he may be certain that Calvin would here recognize God in the role of historian and so, in an indirect way, even these words would have passed from God's lips to the inspired writer. Calvin extricated himself from far more difficult situations than this one, and so a decidedly weightier problem than the one just mentioned would be required to cause him any great concern. He would instantly confront such an inquirer with the charge that he (the inquirer) was "cavilling" and therefore unworthy of serious consideration.

It is interesting to note that Calvin not only believed in the doctrine of inspiration as touching the content of the message of Scripture, but that the very style in which this message was delivered was inspired also. If scriptural phrases were couched in lowly terms,

then surely even this fact carried with it great significance:

"Our hearts are still more firmly assured (of the authority of Scripture) when we reflect that our admiration is excited more by the dignity of the matter than by the graces of style. For it is not without an admirable arrangement of Providence, that the sublime mysteries of the kingdom of heaven have for the greater part been delivered with a contemptible meanness of words. Had they been adorned with more splendid eloquence, the wicked might have cavilled, and alleged that this constituted all their force. But now when an unpolished simplicity, almost bordering on rudeness, makes a deeper impression than the loftiest flights of oratory, what does it indicate if not that the Holy Scriptures are too mighty in the power of truth to need the rhetorician's art?"¹

If, on the other hand, we are struck by the unusual literary beauty of a certain passage, that too, denotes a specific purpose of the Divine Author:

"I confess, however, that in elegance and beauty, nay, splendour, the style of some of the prophets is not surpassed by the eloquence of heathen writers. By examples of this description, the Holy Spirit was pleased to show, that it was not from want of eloquence He in other instances used a rude and homely style. But whether you read David, Isaiah, and others of the same class, whose discourse flows

¹Institutes I.viii.1.

sweet and pleasant; or Amos the herdsman, Jeremiah and Zechariah, whose rougher idiom savours of rusticity; that majesty of the Spirit to which I adverted appears conspicuously in all."¹

Indeed, the very order in which the books of the Pentateuch have come to us, was prescribed by the Holy Spirit:

"Some will perhaps be found who..... still think that I have inconsiderately, and therefore unnecessarily, altered the order which the Holy Spirit Himself has prescribed to us. Now, there cannot be a doubt that what was dictated to Moses was excellent in itself,...but what he delivered in Four Books, it has been my endeavor so to collect and arrange, that, at first sight...unpractised readers" may "more easily, more commodiously, and more profitably acquaint themselves with the writings of Moses."²

God had overlooked nothing. Every word was set in its respective place for some specific reason; each book must find its place among the other books according to divine arrangement. Any man writing a book would naturally use his best judgment and discretion as to the arrangement of his chapters. Why not ascribe this same logical and orderly procedure to the Author of Scripture? It was inconceivable that any other course had been taken.

¹Institutes I.viii.2.

²Preface to Commentary on Harmony of Pentateuch.

Regarding the differences in the narratives recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, he declares in his Argument prefixed to his Harmony of these Gospels, that this diversity was not purposely aimed at by the Evangelists, but was due to the overruling providence of God. God had a distinct purpose in so planning the work:

"But I have already often notified that the Spirit of God fitly allotted to the several evangelists their parts, so that what we do not find in one or two of them we can learn from others."¹

Calvin freely speaks of the Holy Spirit's mode and manner of speech:

"The mode in which the Spirit usually speaks in Scripture is, that God was the enemy of men until they were restored to favor by the death of Christ, (Rom.v.10.)"²

"The word 'Behold' is used emphatically, to denote the greatness of the event; for this is the manner in which the Spirit usually speaks of great and remarkable events, in order to elevate the minds of men."³

of His design:

"It is to be observed, that the design of the Holy Spirit is here to teach... the goodness and liberality of God."⁴

¹Commentary on Harmony of Synoptic Gospels: Luke xxiv.13.

²Institutes II.xvi.2.

³Commentary on Isaiah vii.14.

⁴Commentary on Ps.xlvii.2.

of His purpose:

"If, therefore, the Holy Ghost in this Psalm introduces to our notice truths which are sufficiently familiar to experience, it is that He may raise our minds from them to the higher truth of the divine government of the world."¹

and of His intention:

"We now understand the Holy Spirit's intention in this verse, for He says the authors of this perfidy should not be ordinary men, but the chief among the counsellors."²

Calvin believed the Scripture to be the "School of the Holy Spirit" and that all men should go as little children and sit at His feet for heavenly instruction. Straight thinking and straight living depended upon it. The course of study which the great Teacher offers is complete, lacking no needful thing, and, too, omitting all things that are not necessary for our highest welfare. Therefore, it behooves every pupil to learn conscientiously everything that is taught. He says:

"Therefore, in order to keep the legitimate course in this matter, we must return to the word of God, in which we are furnished with the right rule of understanding. For Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which as nothing useful and necessary to be known has been omitted, so nothing is

¹Commentary on Ps.xlix.1.

²Commentary on Daniel, Vol.II, p.312.

taught but what it is of importance to know."¹

Frequently he uses the phrase, "The Holy Spirit teaches us,"² and one must admit that Calvin was a faithful and painstaking pupil in this school. He was sure that all earthly teachers were subject to error, lacking complete knowledge, and influenced to a large degree by contemporary thought. Error lurked in the pathway of anyone who chose to go elsewhere for his instruction, whether he be layman or ecclesiastic:

"I am not ignorant, indeed, of the assertion, which is now more than threadbare, 'that images are the books of the unlearned.' So said Gregory: but the Holy Spirit gives a very different decision; and had Gregory got his lesson in this matter in the Spirit's school, he never would have spoken as he did."³

To close one's eyes to the teaching of the Holy Spirit was utter folly and augured disaster both for the individual and for society. It was inconceivable that men should choose darkness rather than light; that they should receive information from questionable sources when the doors always stood ajar to the school where God's Holy Spirit was the Teacher and where heavenly wisdom was imparted with an eternal perspective.

¹Institutes III.xxi.3.

²Commentary on Psalms i.4; xviii.20; xv.1;xvii.1;xvii.13; and Dedication to Commentary on Jeremiah.

³Commentary on Psalms, Vol.II, p. 262.

Chapter II.

SUPREME AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Calvin's extreme view of inspiration naturally led him to affirm the supreme authority of Holy Scripture in all matters. He realized that any system of doctrine presented in his day must contain an infallible source of authority to which men might submit themselves. As was pointed out in the Introduction, men had too recently come from under the domination of the papacy to be set free entirely. In fact, it was not freedom which they wanted but an authority based upon truth and righteousness. Calvin, himself, felt that he must have some supreme basis for his system of doctrine from which no appeal could be made. He recognized in Holy Scripture just the authority for which he was seeking. Was it not God's own Word, therefore a part of Himself? It was impossible to separate God from His Word. It followed, then, that no one could be subservient to God without acknowledging, at the same time, his willingness to submit to scriptural decrees. Calvin declared:

"This is the first clause, that we owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has

proceeded from Him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it."¹

It is very plain from this that he believed that the authority of Scripture rested upon the character of God Himself. On another occasion he wrote:

"Our faith in doctrine is not established until we have a perfect conviction that God is its author. Hence, the highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of Him whose Word it is."²

We come to know God in Scripture and we come to evaluate Scripture through our knowledge of God. It may seem like arguing in a circle, but it made a tremendous appeal to the Protestant mind of Calvin's time, and, for that matter, to Calvin's own mind.

No one can ever accuse him of disloyalty to this belief of his. When he presented to the people some conviction which possessed him, he always confined his argument to an appeal to Scripture. He considered his points proved when they were backed by Scripture texts. It was in this way, he claimed, that he was able to remain free from false doctrine. Men might put forth any conceivable idea but the Scriptures taught only what

¹Commentary on II Timothy iii.16.

²Institutes I.vii.4.

God Himself would have us believe:

"Is this to learn Jesus Christ, when without the Word of God we lend our ears to every kind of doctrine, even though it be true? If we once receive doctrine as it comes from man, shall we not soon also swallow lies with like facility? For what has man of his own except vanity? Let us show ourselves obedient disciples of the Lord; such as He wishes us to be, that is, humble, poor, pretending to no wisdom of our own, full of zeal to learn, knowing nothing - not seeking to know anything except that which He shall teach us; and, still more, avoiding as deadly poison everything which is foreign or opposed to His doctrine."¹

It was altogether possible that men might fail to believe certain scriptural truths because they were ignorant of them, but it was unthinkable that men would deliberately defy divine revelation. Some, however, only pretended ignorance that they might perform their own desires. This practice was nothing short of an assault upon heaven:

"If, under a pretence of ignorance, they seek the praise of modesty, what greater arrogance can be imagined than to utter one word in opposition to the authority of God - to say for instance, 'I think otherwise', - 'I would not have this subject touched'? But if they openly blaspheme, what will they gain by assaulting Heaven?"²

¹From Calvin's Psychopannychia.

²Institutes I.xviii.3.

Blasphemy of this kind caused Calvin to lose his patience and on one occasion he threw forbearance to the winds and declared, in no uncertain terms, that it was the prerogative of the elect to compel allegiance to the divine authority of Scripture when it was flouted in this manner.¹ Such instances of resistance to God's Word were similar to those in the Old Testament when men distinctly heard God's very voice and then disobeyed Him. Sore punishment was allotted to men of that type then; should not the same method be used with them now?

It was something of this attitude which caused Calvin to incorporate biblical laws into the government of the city of Geneva. The authority of Scripture went beyond matters of faith and included the ordinary affairs of life. The theocracy established at Geneva was an outgrowth of this conviction. Therefore, when God's laws became the laws of the city, they were subject to enforcement by officials of the community. It goes without saying, that scriptural authority had reached its most extreme expression in this sort of procedure.

¹"To resist God's Word is blasphemy, to be met not by argument, but by coercion. There must then be authority to compel obedience to God's Word, since all deviation from it is a criminal act, not a corrigible error of judgment.....Here is the absolute truth, the revealed Word of God; those who will conform themselves to it - well; those who will not must be compelled into submission." Quoted by Mark Pattison: Essays, Vol.II, pp.13,14.

If disobedience to the authority of Scripture was blasphemy, then disagreement with it was, to say the least, "presumptuous":

"But since the whole Scripture proclaims that He was clothed with flesh in order to become a redeemer, it is presumptuous to imagine any other cause or end."¹

As far as Calvin was concerned, any argument was settled when the meaning of Scripture was ascertained. It was a mere waste of time to seek further verification and, furthermore, it was exceedingly unbecoming in the Christian to desire further information on the subject. This attitude gave him much comfort. He was never left in suspense. There was no element of tentativeness in his convictions. If the Lord had spoken, that settled it. This was the covert in which he sought refuge when uncertainty loomed before him. It was not God's will that we should remain in doubt about anything. In times past He had used natural phenomena to acquaint men's minds with His truth, but now his plainly written Word was available to all and in it, certainty awaited the searcher:

"But if we perceive that God moveth men's hearts by lightning, rain, and tempests: let us assure ourselves that we be double-fold guilty before

¹Institutes II.xii.4.

Him, when we be familiarly taught,
not by a confused noise, but by His
Word, so as He offereth us a doc-
trine that is certain, and wherein
we may be edified."¹

Calvin was perfectly willing to circumscribe his knowledge if such an act would add to his submission to Scripture. His only desire was to know the mind of the Spirit and he believed it to be the part of wisdom to reject the imaginations of men and embrace only that which the Scriptures teach. Worldly wisdom profiteth nothing, but, instead, tends to rob the mind of divine truth:

"Wherefore, if we would be duly wise,
we must renounce those vain babblings
of idle men, concerning the nature,
ranks, and number of angels, without
any authority from the Word of God....
Bidding adieu, therefore, to that
nugatory wisdom, let us endeavor to
ascertain from the simple doctrine of
Scripture what it is the Lord's pleas-
ure that we should know concerning
angels."²

Here he strikes a blow at the Papists' emphasis upon tradition. They were at perfect liberty to speculate to their heart's content because they were not bound entirely to Scripture. Calvin believed that such a practice had led to "vain babblings" where one man's word was as

¹Sermon on Job xxxvii.1-6.

²Institutes I.xiv.4.

good as another's, and consequently no basic truth was available. Procedure of this kind robbed the Church of its united voice and concerted conviction. It was possible that she would have as large a variety of opinions as she had expositors. It brought about disintegration in the body of doctrine to which the Church stood as witness:

"The unity of the Church...itself" is "founded on...the authority of Scripture. When, therefore, they (the Papists) separate faith from Scripture,...they not only strip Christ of His garments, but tear in pieces His Body by shocking sacrilege."¹

Therefore, the church must refuse to give ear to anyone speaking from any other authority save Scripture. The mind of man was never exalted among God's people in the Old Testament. Prophets expected to be heard only when their messages were prefaced with "Thus saith the Lord." Surely after hundreds of years the same precaution was necessary. This was the Church's only safeguard against heresy, and to lend her ears to the contradictory voices of men, simply opened the way for her downfall.² The preachers in the early Protestant

¹Commentary on John, Vol.II, p.230.

²"We now see what is the lawful authority which ought to be in force in the Church, and which we ought to obey without dispute, and to which all ought to submit. It is

churches were held strictly to the rule that they must be "Ministers of the Word." Those were no times for variety of opinion but unanimity of conviction. The Roman Church had made the Reformation inevitable by pitting tradition against Holy Scripture and Calvin was determined that Protestantism should not go on the rocks because of a multiple allegiance.

There was no exception to this rule. Men, whether of high or low estate, were all subject to the authority of Scripture. Calvin recognized no "divine right of kings." The most powerful king, on the most exalted throne, was as responsible to God's Word as the humblest peasant. Popes and priests were not exempted from the general rule because of their ecclesiastical superiority. Transgression of God's law was sin, whether committed in high places or low. God, being no respecter of persons, required that all men submit to His decrees as set forth in Scripture:

then only that this authority exists, when God Himself speaks by men, and the Holy Spirit employs them as instruments. For the prophet brings not forward any empty title; he does not say that he is a high priest of the tribe of Levi, or of the first order, or of the family of Aaron. He alleges no such thing, but says that the word of God was deposited with him. Whosoever then demands to be heard in the Church, must of necessity really prove that he is a preacher of God's word; and he must not bring his own devices, nor blend with the word anything that proceeds from the judgment of his own flesh." Commentary on Minor Prophets, Vol. II, p.19.

"....the Lord would have all, without exception to be ruled by His word; and He takes this as a proof of men's obedience, their submission to His word....The same reason holds good as to priests;they are not raised up so much on high, but that the Lord shines eminently above their heads with His word. Let us know, lastly, that in the Church the word of God so possesses the highest rank, that neither priests, nor kings, nor their counsellors, can claim a privilege to themselves, as though their conduct was not to be subject to God's word."¹

While Calvin did not waver in his affirmation that the Church had no right to place its attestation of scriptural authority above that of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, he was not unmindful of the fact that the consent of the Church did have its place and influence:

"The consent of the Church is not without its weight. For it is not to be accounted of no consequence, that from the first publication of Scripture, so many ages have uniformly concurred in yielding obedience to it, and that, notwithstanding the many extraordinary attempts which Satan and the whole world have made to oppress and overthrow it, or completely efface it from the memory of men, it has flourished like the palm tree and continued invincible....Nay, its divine origin is more completely established by the fact, that when all human wishes were against it, it advanced by its own energy.... Its

¹Commentary on Minor Prophets, Vol. I, pp.182,183.

authority was recognized as far and as wide as the world extends - ... an agreement which a Divine Providence alone could have produced."¹

However, Scripture did not stand or fall on the consent of or rejection by the Church. It was only right and proper that the Church should give it her allegiance, and, of course, this would carry weight with many. Therefore it was not a negligible thing. But it should be remembered that if an occasion ever arose where one found it necessary to choose between the judgment of the Church and the judgment of Scripture, there was only one course to pursue, viz., to follow implicitly the mandates of Scripture.

"There is a Father who contends that the Church ought not to prefer herself to Christ, who always judges truly, whereas ecclesiastical judges, who are but men, are generally deceived. Having burst through this barrier also, they hesitate not to suspend the whole authority of Scripture on the judgment of the Church."²

Calvin does not forget that many of the readers of his works will be unbelievers, and therefore sets forth certain arguments which he hopes will appeal to their consciences and bring them finally to an acceptance of the authority of Scripture. The first which

¹Institutes I.viii.12.

²Letter to Francis prefacing his Institutes.

he mentions is, that Scripture bears upon its face evidences of its truth:

"As to the question, How shall we be persuaded that it came from God without recurring to a decree of the Church? it is just the same as if it were asked, How shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Scripture bears upon the face of it as clear evidence of its truth, as white and black do of their color, sweet and bitter of their taste."¹

It seemed unthinkable that anyone should question the heavenly origin of Scripture. It was, to Calvin, a fact so simple that anyone could comprehend it. Seeing eyes could not fail to recognize the uniqueness of its message. The Book was so far superior to any others that no confusion of this Book with others was possible:

"For the Lord has so knit together the certainty of His word and His Spirit, that our minds are duly imbued with reverence for the word when the Spirit shining upon it enables us there to behold the face of God; and on the other hand, we embrace the Spirit with no danger of delusion when we recognize Him in His image, that is, in His Word."²

Neither the import of the message or the style in which it was presented could conceal the presence of the Author.

¹Institutes I.vii.2.

²Ibid. I.ix.3.

His personality shone through the written word and impressed itself upon the reader. It would be a strange person who could read the sacred pages and question their origin. His sensibilities would have to be numbed entirely, his ears deafened, his eyes blinded, and his heart sadly unresponsive. The Divine Presence fairly leaped out at the reader as he read the words, to make known His purposes and plans for mankind. Who would be so bold as to question the authority of Scripture when its authority manifested itself on its very face?

Calvin's second proof is that we are impressed with scriptural authority by reading it. He is not concerned this time primarily with the way in which it vindicates its claim to authority on its surface, but points to the reaction which takes place in our inmost beings as we drink in its divine message. Speaking of Paul's declaration in I Corinthians ii.5, that his speech and preaching among them had been "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," Calvin says:

"For the truth is vindicated in opposition to every doubt, when, unsupported by foreign aid, it has its whole sufficiency in itself. How peculiarly this property belongs to Scripture appears from this, that no human writings,

however skillfully composed, are at all capable of affecting us in a similar way. Read Demosthenes or Cicero, read Plato, Aristotle, or any other of that class: you will, I admit, feel wonderfully allured, pleased, moved, enchanted; but turn from them to the reading of the Sacred Volume, and whether you will or not, it will so affect you, so pierce your heart, so work its way into your very marrow, that, in comparison of the impression so produced, that of orators and philosophers will almost disappear; making it manifest that in the Sacred Volume there is a truth divine, a something which makes it immeasurably superior to all the gifts and graces attainable by man."¹

How different from other messages is this Book divine! It brings comfort when other comforters fail; it fills the heart with abiding joy when other literature brings only temporary pleasure; it points out the way when other books only befog the pathway; it brings us into fellowship with God Himself, whereas other writings only tell us something about Him. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against Thee." Of what other book could these words have been written?

And then, while Calvin is prone to minimize the place of reason in the Christian life, he gives it a place here. This is, it must be admitted, not the most acceptable approach to the authority of Scripture, but if any insist

¹Institutes I.viii.1.

upon it, it can be done:

"It is true, indeed, that if we choose to proceed in the way of argument, it is easy to establish, by evidence of various kinds, that if there is a God in heaven, the Law, the Prophecies, and the Gospel proceeded from Him. Nay, although learned men, and men of the greatest talent, should take the opposite side, summoning and ostentatiously displaying all the powers of their genius in the discussion; if they are not possessed of shameless effrontery, they will be compelled to confess that the Scripture exhibits clear evidence of its being spoken by God, and consequently, of its containing His heavenly doctrine."¹

He also appeals to men's reasons when he challenges them to explain how humble fishermen were able to produce such majestic books as those written by the Evangelists.² Even mere reason would cause them to admit that they "treat of heavenly mysteries beyond the capacity of men." No amount of skepticism can dispose of the living throbbing Gospels which stand today as monuments to the fact of divine revelation. They constitute an unanswerable argument for scriptural authority since nothing save the Spirit's presence and power could have given these documents the mighty influence which they have exerted upon the world.

¹Institutes I.vii.4.

²Ibid. I.viii.11.

Prophecy, too, appealed to Calvin as an unmistakable proof of authority in Scripture. Speaking of the calamity which befell Babylon, Calvin writes:

"And we must observe that Jeremiah had many years thus prophesied of Babylon; and hence we conclude that his mind as well as his tongue was guided by the Spirit of God, for he could not have possibly conjectured what would be after eighty years."¹

Calvin never ceased to wonder at the ability of the prophets to predict future events. The most foolish would refrain from asserting that such a phenomenon lay within the possibilities of mere men. A good guesser might predict rightly occasionally, but not always, as was true of the prophets. He mentions Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekial and Daniel, and the fulfillment of their wonderful predictions, and concludes that this "demonstration" of Divine Presence in and through them, "is too clear to be liable to any cavils."²

As his line of argument progresses, Calvin points to the blood of the martyrs as indicative of their devotion to the Gospel message:

"It is therefore no small proof of the authority of Scripture, that it was sealed with the blood of so many witnesses, especially when it is considered that in bearing testimony to

¹Commentary on Jeremiah 11.57.

²Institutes I.viii.8.

the faith, they met death, not with fanatical enthusiasm, but with a firm and constant, yet sober godly zeal."¹

It was because of their assurance of the divine nature of Scripture that they were willing to give their lives for the principles which it proclaimed. They would have been slow to forfeit their lives for the words of men, but not so for the Word of God - "they hesitated not, with intrepid boldness, and even with great alacrity, to die in its defence."²

Nor would Calvin have us forget that miracles play a part in confirming the authority of the Word:

"Here we ought carefully to observe the use of signs, that is, the reason why God performs miracles, namely, to confirm us in the belief of His word; for when we see His power, if we have any hesitation about what He says to us, our doubt is removed by beholding the thing itself; for miracles added to the word are seals."³

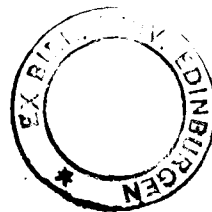
He points to all the miracles which Moses performed as "so many testimonies from heaven of his being a true prophet."⁴ If a true prophet, then should not his accounts of divine revelation be received at face value? And if

¹Institutes I.viii.13.

²Ibid. I.viii.13.

³Commentary on Isaiah vii.10.

⁴Institutes I.viii.5.



so, do not these accounts attest the fact that the Scriptures are the Word of God and therefore authoritative?

And finally, he declares that the Scriptures will "only be effectual to produce the saving knowledge of God, when the certainty of it will be founded on the internal persuasion of the Holy Spirit."¹ This introduces us to his great doctrine of the Holy Spirit's witness in our hearts to the genuineness of Scripture. The doctrine will be dealt with in the next chapter. It is his supreme proof of scriptural authority, and upon it he rests his case.

However, after all has been said, Calvin admits that "persons betray great folly, who wish it to be demonstrated to infidels that Scripture is the word of God, which cannot be known without faith."² This principle is a forerunner of Prof. William James's "Will To Believe." It is not by waiting for unanswerable proof that we arrive at the truth or falsity of anything. It is only as we act upon it as though it were true that we come to give it its true evaluation. No person who awaits for a mathematical proof that the Scriptures possess divine authority will

¹Institutes I.viii.13.

²Ibid. I.viii.13.

ever receive it, but those who approach it and use it as if it were in truth God's inspired Word, will come to hear His voice as they read its pages and feel His presence as they ponder upon its divine message.

Chapter III.

THE WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the first few chapters of his Institutes, Calvin declares that a thorough understanding of the Scriptures is necessary to an adequate conception of God. Our knowledge of Him is proportionate to our knowledge of the Scriptures. As we read the sacred pages we see His nature revealed and his divine purposes made plain. We hear His voice giving utterance to majestic messages to the hearts of men.

He has not proceeded far with this argument when he realizes that, while this is his own conviction, it may be doubted by others. What proof shall he produce that will impress upon the minds of men the authority of Scripture, that they may "regard it with due reverence"? What word can he say that will "remove every doubt" from their hearts that Scripture is in truth the very Word of God?

There is one thing which may be taken as settled -- Calvin will never answer those questions by resorting to the authority of the Church. This had been the time-honored custom of the Papists. Anyone raising a question as to why Scripture should be

considered God's inspired Word, was immediately silenced by the reply that the Church declared it to be such. If anyone expected Calvin to retain this doctrine of the Roman Church he was doomed to disappointment. He lost no time in declaring his decided aversion to such a tenet:

"A most pernicious error has very generally prevailed; viz., that Scripture is of importance only in so far as weight is conceded to it by the suffrage of the church; as if the eternal and inviolable truth of God could depend on the will of men. With great insult to the Holy Spirit, it is asked, 'Who can assure us that the Scriptures proceeded from God?'"¹

He also declares:

"Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the fiction, that the power of judging Scripture is in the Church, and that on her nod its certainty depends."²

Calvin was amazed that any group of men should resort to such "unlimited tyranny" as to affirm that they were empowered to decide "what reverence is due to the Scripture, and what books are to be comprised in its canon." As he stated in a quotation cited previously, this presumption was nothing short of an "insult to the Holy Spirit."

¹Institutes I.vii.1.

²Ibid. I.vii.2.

For those Papists who quote Augustine in defence of their contention, Calvin has a ready answer. It was a common thing for them to cite the words of this famous Father when he said "that he would not believe the Gospel unless he were influenced by the authority of the Church." Calvin points out that the context from which these words were taken makes it impossible for this saying to be used in support of the Catholics' belief. These words had been spoken to the Manichees in an argument which Augustine had had with them and he had said that, if he were a pagan, he would not believe the Gospel without the authority of the Church.

Having neatly removed this false basis upon which many of the Papists had built their faith in the authority of Scripture, Calvin proceeds to unfold his own doctrine - the Witness of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men:

"If it be objected, 'How can this be known?' I answer both to disciples and to teachers, God is made known to be the author of it by the revelation of the same Spirit. Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have received from their hand, but, speaking at the suggestion of God, they boldly and fearlessly testified, what was actually true, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spake. The same Spirit, therefore, who made Moses and the prophets certain of their calling, now also testifies to

our hearts, that He has employed them as His servants to instruct us. Accordingly, we need not wonder if there are many who doubt as to the Author of Scripture; for, although the majesty of God is displayed in it, yet none but those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit have eyes to perceive what ought, indeed, to have been visible to all, and yet is visible to the elect alone."¹

This doctrine was not wholly original with Calvin. Luther and Melanchthon had referred to it in a certain sense, but, says Doumergue, "It is Calvin who introduced it, with all its developments, in Protestant theology."² Köstlin, Luther's biographer, freely admits that Calvin first set forth this doctrine.³ It was in his first edition of the Institutes that Calvin gave expression to his conviction that it was only the Holy Spirit who could impress upon the hearts of men the genuineness of Scripture. The doctrine seemed to grow with each new edition of his great work until finally he was able to say:

"Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit."⁴

¹Commentary on II Timothy iii.16.

²Jean Calvin, Vol.IV, p.56.

³Ibid.

⁴Institutes I.vii.5.

This declaration makes it plain to us that he not only rejected the authority of the Church, but looked with decided disapproval upon any attempt to strengthen the claims of Scripture by appeal to "proofs and arguments." These things might have their place in trying to attract the attention of unbelievers to the nature of Scripture, but it was unthinkable that the Christian should require anything of this sort to keep his faith aglow. He would never agree to put reason above God's own testimony concerning His Word. Such a course was disloyalty to supreme authority, an admission of a lack of faith, a practice common among worldlings but disdained by the elect.

"It is preposterous to attempt by discussion, to rear up a full faith in Scripture.....But although we may maintain the sacred word of God against gainsayers, it does not follow that we shall forthwith implant the certainty which faith requires in their hearts. Profane men think that religion rests only on opinion, and, therefore, that they may not believe foolishly, or on slight grounds, desire and insist to have it proved by reason that Moses and the prophets were divinely inspired. But I answer that the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to His own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit."¹

¹Institutes I.vii.4.

Calvin was not even willing that common sense should play too large a part in receiving Scripture. He didn't deny its presence and legitimate use but he was sincerely jealous of the primacy of divine authority. A distinction must be clearly made, and for the ability to do this he devoutly prayed:

"Besides this, may we distinguish
between that common sense which
Thou hast bestowed upon us, and
the illumination of Thy Spirit."¹

All other human props being removed, Calvin delighted in the idea that Holy Scripture stood upon its own feet. God needed not that any person should declare valid the divine words which He had uttered. As His Spirit hovered over the prophets and apostles, breathing into them the words of Scripture, so would He be present with the reader of the sacred Book, satisfying his heart that it was genuine and therefore authoritative. "How may I know this Book to be inspired of God?" one might ask. "Read its pages and you will feel His Divine Presence in your heart authenticating every word," Calvin would reply.² As long as one tried

¹From Prayer before Lecture. Commentary on Daniel, Vol.I, p.161.

²"Le Témoignage intérieur du Saint-Esprit leur suffisait. Il était pour eux le suprême garant de l'autorité de la Sainte-Ecriture. Le reste leur important peu." J.Chapuis: Le Témoignage du Saint-Esprit dans la théologie de Calvin. p.36.

to bolster up his faith in Scripture by human means, he would never be rewarded by God's assurance, but, having cast every earthly device aside, and having come in simple trust to a complete confidence in God's ability to substantiate His own truth, he might expect an immediate confirmation in his heart that the words before him were of divine origin. What could be simpler and what more comforting? Men leaned heavily upon Holy Scripture and they yearned for a word of certainty concerning its unchanging worth to the sons of men. That desire of men's hearts had been wonderfully met by God's provision that His Spirit should accompany the Word:

"That the assurance of this immutability of God's word may be rooted in our minds, the inward revelation of the Holy Spirit is indeed necessary; for until God seal within us the certainty of His word, our belief of its certainty will be continually wavering."¹

"If, then, we would consult most effectually for our consciences, and save them from being driven about in a whirl of uncertainty, from wavering, and even stumbling at the smallest obstacle, our conviction of the truth of Scripture must be derived from a higher source than human conjectures, judgments, or reasons; namely, the secret testimony of the Spirit."²

¹Commentary on Psalms: Ps. cxix.151.

²Institutes I.vii.4.

Calvin made it plain that the testimony of the Holy Spirit must not be confused with any new revelation from God. Abundant revelation had been made and committed to writing. The need was not for more revelation but a means whereby revelation already received might be declared genuine:

"Hence, the office of the Spirit promised to us, is not to form new and unheard-of revelations, or to coin a new form of doctrine, by which we may be led away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but to seal on our minds the very doctrine which the gospel recommends."¹

It never entered the mind of God to allow His Spirit to replace His Word. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the early apostles was by no means an occasion for deserting the written Word, nor did the apostles so interpret it. The Spirit empowered them as they preached the Word and opened men's hearts for its reception. In fact, the Word and the Spirit were co-workers, mutually dependent upon each other. Both were needed by men in their search for divine truth:

"The peculiar government of God is that of His Church only, where, by His word and Spirit, He bends the hearts of men to obedience, so that they follow Him voluntarily and willingly, being taught inwardly and outwardly, - inwardly by

¹Institutes I.ix.1.

the influence of His Spirit, -
outwardly by the preaching of the
word."¹

Calvin did not confuse his doctrine of the testimony of the Holy Spirit with his belief in the illumination of the Holy Spirit. These were separate and distinct functions of the Spirit, though they may take place simultaneously. It is very evident that both functions were essential to the earnest seeker after the knowledge of God's will and purpose. It would have done little good for God to have spoken to men and to have authenticated what He had spoken, if he had not made plain His message. The Spirit, then, was not only the Speaker in the Scriptures, the Announcer of its authority and source in the hearts of men, but the Interpreter of the words set before them. He is, indeed, that great "Spirit of truth" who guides men, even as Christ promised, "into all truth" (John xvi.13.). Calvin's figure, previously referred to, of the Scripture as "the school of the Holy Spirit," takes on new meaning here. Not only does the great Teacher speak wisdom to His pupils, but graciously explains His message and throws abundant light on passages of doubtful meaning:

¹Commentary on Minor Prophets, Vol.III, p.261.

"And as the seed, covered with earth, lieth hid for a time, so the Lord will illuminate us by His Spirit, and will cause that reading which, being barren and void of fruit, causeth nothing but wearisomeness, to have plain light of understanding."¹

This form of the Spirit's work seemed to have been a forerunner, in Calvin's mind, even to his great doctrine of the Spirit's testimony to scriptural authority. Certainly it is this phase of the Spirit's work which is touched upon in the first edition of the Institutes.² It is interesting to note that this reference to his convictions on the subject is kept intact from the first to the last of the several editions of the Institutes. The man of forty-nine years reaffirms the belief which was his at twenty-six, that God throws a heavenly light across the misty pathway of the pilgrim on his journey across the pages of Holy Scripture.

¹Commentary on Acts, Vol.I, p.360.

²"Dans l'Institution de 1536, Calvin avait déjà déposé le germe de sa grande et célèbre doctrine. Voici le début et la fin d'un paragraphe, resté intact de 1536 à 1559: 'Je confesse que la Foy est propre et entière oeuvre du Saint-Esprit.....Par la lumière de son Saint-Esprit, le Seigneur esclaire en nostre entendement et donne entrée à noz coeurs, et à la Parolle, et aux sacremens: les quelz autrement bat-troient seulement aux oreilles et se présenteroient aux yeux, mais ils ne pénétreroient et n'esmouveroient point le dedans.'" Doumergue: Jean Calvin, Vol.IV., p.57.

It is this phase of Calvin's doctrine which brings it into greatest contrast with the doctrine of Scripture held by the Roman Church.¹ It is true that there was a point of agreement between them, viz., that all Scripture came from God, but there was a distinct parting of the ways when the subjects of authenticity and interpretation were approached. The Papists, having affirmed that Scripture was the Word of God because the Church declared it to be such, went still further and declared that the Church must be the interpreter of Scripture to the people. The doctrines taught by Scripture were too precious and too much depended upon their right interpretation for the masses to be allowed to search the Scriptures for themselves and thereby come to their own conclusions. This ability to "rightly divide the word of truth" was confined to the representatives of the Church and to them the people must come for information concerning what the Bible really taught. Calvin's doctrine is diametrically opposed to this. In a democratic spirit, and keeping the

¹"La Sainte-Ecriture avait, aux yeux de Calvin, une infallibilité à laquelle toute âme d'homme devait se soumettre; néanmoins, il n'entendait pas que l'on se soumit servilement, comme Rome le demandait. Il voulait qu'on comprît la Sainte-Ecriture qu'on en saisisse la vérité et la beauté." J. Chapuis: Le Témoignage du Saint-Esprit dans la théologie de Calvin, p. 41.

truth of the priesthood of believers in mind, he declared that not only did God make known to us the authenticity of Scripture, but he illuminated its pages with His Divine Spirit that all might read and understand. His whole doctrine is theocentric - God, the Giver, Attestor, and Interpreter of Scripture. And all these functions of the Almighty with regard to His Word were vouchsafed to the humblest believer, when he approached the Word in simple faith and child-like trust.

Another bulwark of strength is thus reared by Calvin in his tremendous doctrine of Holy Scripture. He started out to impress the people with its divinity and its importance to the Christian life. How logically he moves forward! No stone is left unturned. No gap is left unfilled. An opponent will be confronted with seemingly insurmountable difficulties in his endeavor to find a breach in his strong wall of defence.

Chapter IV.

THE SCRIPTURES INERRANT AND CONSISTENT

The infallibility of the Scriptures was axiomatic with Calvin. His system of doctrine was based upon this belief and it was with unswerving certainty that he declared his position in this regard.¹ He spoke as one who had ventured forth upon Scripture, taking its inerrancy for granted, and had returned from his journey completely whole. It had borne his weight. His confidence had not been misplaced. It had met every difficulty, had stood erect under severe stress and strain, and had never for a moment given any evidence of weakening. His insistence upon scriptural inerrancy was not a position which he took at the beginning of his career as a theologian and later forsook, but a constant and abiding principle upon which he labored. It was the background of his sermons, the

¹"Il faut accorder à la Bible, a toute la Bible, une confiance absolue. 'Ce qui est contenu en l'Escriture sainte est certain et infallible et il ne faut point disputer làdessus, comme on pourra faire sur ce qui est dit des hommes....quand l'Escriture nous est mise en avant, encore que nous puissions avoir beaucoup de repliques (ce nous semble) pour dire qu'il n'est pas ainsi, toutesfois que nous acquiescions simplement. Et puis, si nos sens fretillent, et que nos esprits s'esgarent ça et là, que tout soit rabatu.' (Calv.op.,XLVI, p.343.)"
Quoted by Albert Cruvellier: La Prédication de Calvin.

basis of his voluminous expositions of Scripture, and the undergirding upon which he rested all he had to say regarding God's Word and its place in the Christian religion.

While this belief in the infallibility of the Scriptures was not an early conviction which he later discarded, neither was it a working principle which slowly he came to adopt as his work progressed and such a doctrine was found to be necessary. He seems to have entered upon his ministry with such a conception and, as years rolled by, finding it both compatible with the results of his scriptural investigations and consistent with his doctrine of inspiration, he clung to it with all his heart. If doubts ever arose in his mind with regard to it, he kept them very successfully hid within himself. It was a doctrine which he rather gloried in and any difficulty which might be suggested in connection with it only made it more wonderful than ever. A tenet with no problems attached seemed to lose its lustre, but one which continued to exist amid attacks from all sides was one in which Calvin took keen delight.

If he had thought of Scripture as being a book produced by both human and divine authors, he would have made a place in his system for the possibility of error. If he had granted to Scripture the sort of inspiration

which he granted to other influential literature, he would have expected truth to have been mixed with error. But his conviction that all Scripture was God-breathed precluded any such possibility. That God could err never entered his mind. The Scriptures were His words and His words only. Therefore their inerrancy was assured. Human productions were as assuredly tainted with error as divine productions were free from it. That there was no human element in Scripture guaranteed it against error of any sort:

"His (Jeremiah's) doctrine was free from every defect, for the Holy Spirit guided his mind, his thoughts, and his tongue,¹ so that there was in it nothing human."

Calvin recognized that even ~~through~~ a man's mind and thoughts might be under the influence of the Holy Spirit, it was still possible that when he came to give expression to the thoughts of his mind he might so state them that they would be misunderstood and thereby lead to error. Therefore, it was essential that God should control not only man's mental processes but his physical organs also if he was to be used as the agent through whom God's message might reach the people. So, not only were Jeremiah's mind and thoughts guided by the Holy

¹Commentary on Jeremiah xv.18.

Spirit but his tongue also. This complete surrender of the whole self to God left no opening whereby error might creep in. As was pointed out in the chapter on Revelation and Inspiration, this controlling influence of the Spirit even entered into the realm of the tone of voice and word emphasis. An erroneous conception of a stated truth is always possible if the tone of voice is not suited to the truth which is to be stated, or if the emphasis is placed on the wrong word. Calvin had looked after all these details. Nothing had escaped his notice with regard to his doctrine of Scripture. Every avenue for the approach of human influence had been closed every cranny tightly stopped. He was strictly consistent with himself in this matter and deviated not an iota from the position which he took at the beginning.

Such a doctrine as this was Calvin's only guarantee against error in his own teaching. He was very familiar with the gross errors into which the Catholic Church had fallen. It had not been a sudden collapse into false doctrine, but a gradual process had been the manner in which they had fallen. It began in the early centuries of Christianity when the Fathers began to give attention to human tradition. This body of tradition had accumulated as the years passed and each succeeding year appeared to grant it higher authority, until, in Calvin's time,

it ranked in authoritative importance with Scripture itself. It is true that the Church did not give it her official sanction, as being equal in authority with Scripture, until the Council of Trent, but it was generally accepted long years before this. It was to Calvin a case similar to the one Christ faced in His day. The Jewish religion had come to be based on Scripture plus tradition until it was a thing corrupt and ungodly. If one wished to discover the actual God-given elements contained in the religion which the average Jew practiced in the first century, it would have been necessary to bore through a great deal of extraneous matter, which was unmistakably human, to reach this element with which God, through the centuries, has endowed them. Calvin had seen the Roman Church suffer from just this thing and he pledged himself to see to it that Protestantism should not so suffer.

One need not suppose that Calvin overestimated his importance when he realized the amount of influence which he exerted on Reformation movements. It is unthinkable that he was unconscious of such an influence. All of this, however, added tremendously to his responsibility. If people were following his leadership, then he must be sure to lead them in right paths. He dreaded the thought of being a blind leader of the blind. Too many would have

rejoiced in their downfall; and far more important than this, he felt commissioned of God to do just what he had undertaken and by God's help he meant to perform it in an acceptable manner. Therefore, it followed that he came to lean heavily upon the words of Scripture. Here was the heavenly beacon that would illumine his pathway and guard his feet from straying:

"When we give ourselves up to be guided and governed by the word of God, we are in no danger of going astray, since this is the path by which He securely guides His own people to salvation."¹

Calvin found himself on many occasions in sore need of a voice that would carry more weight than his own. What he had to say may have been unquestionably true, but his hearers required something more. This is brought out very clearly in his letter addressed to Francis, King of France, which is placed at the beginning of his first volume of the Institutes. He was writing to Francis in an exceedingly straight-forward manner. He was not holding anything back, nor was he mincing words. One must admire the courage with which he attacked corruption in high places and the fervor with which he pointed to nobler ways of living. Francis might have received what he had to say at face value but Calvin realized that

¹Commentary on Psalm xix.7.

anything he might say would be received with a great deal more seriousness if his words were backed by Holy Scripture. He therefore adds to his argument the sanction of that "heavenly oracle" which is "infallible":

"The characteristic of a true sovereign is, to acknowledge that, in the administration of his kingdom, he is a minister of God. He who does not make his reign subservient to the divine glory, acts the part not of a king, but a robber. He moreover, deceives himself who anticipates long prosperity to any kingdom which is not ruled by the sceptre of God, that is, by His divine word. For the heavenly oracle is infallible which has declared, that 'where there is no vision the people perish,' (Proverbs xxix.18.)"¹

He might err, he admitted, but the Scriptures could not. Francis would give ear to God's Word even if he disregarded the protests of a reformer.

This was not the only occasion on which Calvin sealed his arguments by referring to the infallibility of Scripture. Perhaps his own tendency to discredit human deliverances caused him to expect such a tendency in others. If men disagreed with him there was little that he could say, but if they challenged Holy Scripture, he could accuse them of blasphemy and treason against God. The superstitious dare not run counter to the Bible and the devout did not wish to. When he surrounded his words

¹Prefatory address to Francis, Institutes, Vol.I.

with references to the Sacred Book, Calvin was assured of a sympathetic hearing, and the doctrine of its infallibility only intensified this fact. This may appear as a subtle procedure which he devised for his own benefit, but in truth, it was a strong conviction which he had in his heart. He earnestly believed that men should know God's will for their lives, and that this knowledge depended upon a record of revelation which was devoid of error.

Many attempts have been made to prove that Calvin did not always hold to the inerrancy of Scripture. Several quotations from his works have been cited to substantiate this claim. Humanity has a weakness for inconsistency, and Calvin was thoroughly human, but few men could have written as copiously as he, and on so wide a variety of subjects, and be as free from inconsistencies as he. He was as scrupulous in this regard as mortal man could well be. However, neither his best friends nor his most extravagant admirers can deny that he weakens in some places on points which in other places he has insisted upon most vigorously. But, in the matter of inerrancy, it is to be feared that the quotations used most frequently to prove that he was inconsistent in this matter, are citations which, if examined closely, will be found insufficient to prove the point. To be fair with Calvin, one must interpret

his words in the light of all he wrote. Failure to do this will make Calvin's critic guilty of the same fault of which Calvin himself has often been accused, viz., isolating specific passages and basing doctrines upon them.

There are three passages quoted most frequently from the works of Calvin in order to lodge this claim against him, viz., Matthew 1, Matthew xxvii.9, and Acts vii.16. In the first chapter of Matthew, where the genealogy of Christ is recorded, Calvin points out that it is clear from sacred history that three kings have been omitted. This reference is often singled out as a proof that Calvin did not always hold to the inerrancy of Scripture. But, dealing with another difficulty in this same genealogy, he admits an error as he does here, but suggests that the error occurred through the fault or carelessness of copyists. It is only fair to conclude that he had this same source of error in mind when he referred to the omission of the three kings. This can hardly be denied when we note that he adds to his discussion of the first difficulty mentioned, these words:

"They who say that this has been done
through forgetfulness are by no means
to be listened to."¹

¹Commentary on Matthew 1.

As to Matthew xxvii.9, he writes:

"How the name of Jeremiah crept in I confess that I do not know, nor do I anxiously trouble myself; certainly that the name Jeremiah has been put by an error for Zechariah, the thing itself shows; for nothing like this is read in Jeremiah."¹

This admission of error may also be explained on the same grounds as the one just mentioned above. In fact, he uses a word which clearly implies a copyist's error-- "crept in", (obrepserit.) No possible manipulation of this Latin word could make it appear that it was the author's error.

We should notice, too, that Calvin is little concerned with the question of how Jeremiah's name "crept in". He admits that he does not know and adds, "Nor do I anxiously trouble myself." If this had been an error in the original text, it would have troubled him greatly. In fact, it would have gone counter to his whole theory of inspiration. It would have undermined the very foundation upon which his entire doctrinal system rested. It is impossible to believe that Calvin could have passed over such an important discovery with such lightness of heart.

But Calvin's remarks on Actsvii.16 seem to be

¹Commentary on Matthew.9.

the favorite quotation of those desiring to prove Calvin's inconsistency. On this verse he writes:

"It is well known that there is an error in the name Abraham...wherefore this place is to be corrected."¹

He does not say that the error was made by the sacred historian. Here again, we have a Latin word which forbids such an implication. The word translated "corrected" is one that is ordinarily used by critical editors of the New Testament for amending a passage by restoring the true meaning. His theory of inspiration and his express words quoted above (that any suggestion of forgetfulness on the part of the inspired writer was "by no means to be listened to"), all preclude any possibility of a contradiction of his doctrine of scriptural inerrancy.

If anyone is in doubt about this, let him turn to Calvin's discussion of Matthew v.1. Here, while harmonizing the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew with the corresponding discourse which begins in Luke vi.20, he remarks that both Evangelists make no mention of the time when our Lord uttered these words, and expresses his opinion that it was not delivered until after the

¹Commentary on Acts vii.16.

twelve had been chosen. He continues,

"But in preserving the order of time, which I saw was neglected by the Spirit of God, I did not wish to be too curious."¹

The very disregard of the order of time, which might be attributed to human carelessness, he describes as proceeding from the Holy Spirit. If anything was neglected by the Spirit, he knew it was for some special reason and therefore he called a halt on his curiosity. He did not question for a moment the validity of the original manuscripts.

Not only does Calvin teach that the Scriptures are inerrant, but that they are consistent. These two qualities of the Sacred Book seem to go hand in hand in his thinking. It is to be noted that in one place he combines the two ideas in one single paragraph:

"It is of great consequence that we be established in the belief of God's Word, and we are here directed to the unerring certainty which belongs to it... The scope of it (this passage) is plainly this, that God acts consistently with Himself, and can never swerve from what He has said."²

Contradictory statements in Scripture would indicate both

¹Commentary on Matthew v.1.

²Commentary on Psalm lxii.11.

error and inconsistency. But he declares himself witness to the "unerring certainty" and consistency of God's Word.

That God could swerve in one place from what He had said in another was unthinkable. It was the same God speaking in Matthew who spoke in Genesis. The same God in Christ gave the moral and ethical code in the Sermon on the Mount, who delivered to Moses the Ten Commandments and the Levitical law. The Wonderful Counsellor and Mighty God, was also the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. He detected no lack of harmony in these things. The God of Abraham and David was also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that Jesus and David gave different portraits of God was by no means proof that either was mistaken. It was only indicative of the fact that God's nature was so great and many-sided, that any number of descriptions would fail to exhaust His meaning for the world.

This consistency was based on an underlying unity of all Scripture. Christ is the key to the entire Book. Everything in the Old Testament points to Him; everything in the New Testament centers around Him. The history of Israel from Genesis to Revelation is His Story of redemption:

"The Psalmist here celebrates, above all the wonderful works of God, the redemption of the chosen people, to which the Holy Spirit everywhere throughout the Scriptures invites the attention of true believers, in order to encourage them to cherish the hope of their salvation."¹

The whole Book was like a beautiful mosaic, picturing most impressively, the outpouring of God's redeeming love toward His children. As each little stone fitted in between the other stones in perfect symmetry, so each book of Scripture fitted in among the other books, adding to the richness of the picture.

¹Commentary on Psalm lxxvii.15.

Chapter V

THE SCRIPTURES INDISPENSABLE

Calvin considered Scripture to be absolutely essential to man's highest welfare. It was not a luxury - a mere store of good literature and history, but a real necessity for the lives of men. The young lady who, wishing to read her Bible every morning before breakfast, placed a motto above her bed reading "No Bible, No Breakfast", was thoroughly Calvinistic. The Great Reformer valued Holy Scripture far above any material thing. It were much better for his body to go without food than for his soul to go without the Bread of Life. Material food nourished a corruptible body; Holy Scripture nourished an eternal soul. Earthly pleasures, earthly honors, earthly possessions, were fleeting things. One might well do without them. But the Sacred Book was indispensable. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever."

There were many reasons why Calvin considered the Scriptures to be indispensable. One reason was that it served as a norm whereby doctrine might be tested;

"It is not left to every man to frame a system of religion according to his own judgment, but the standard of

godliness is to be taken from the Word of God."¹

All ideas and thoughts must be brought to this touchstone and tried. Only in the light of Scripture were men able to see whether their beliefs were true or false. The wisdom of man was foolishness with God, and without a source of unquestionable truth, they were continually liable to err.

Calvin had seen too many Romanists swallow everything presented to them by the Church without examining it to see whether or not it was true. His idea of faith was not an idea of being blind-folded and then willingly accepting everything handed down from an authoritative Church. This sort of procedure was all right for sheep but not for children of God:

"The faithful must not become so sheepish as to receive whatsoever is told them, but must examine the doctrine whether it be of God or no....How shall that be done? Truly we must not presume to judge of God's truth according to our own wit and fancy. But we must rather captivate all our reason and understanding, as the Scripture showeth us."²

We were commanded to "Search the Scriptures" and to "Prove all things." Christianity was not an obscurantist

¹Commentary on Psalm 1.2.

²From Sermon on Job xxxiii.1-7.

movement but a religion in which means were provided for our knowing whether a doctrine were of God or not. Every doctrine must be tried at the judgment bar of Scripture. If it cannot stand the test, it must be discarded. If it is scriptural, then it must be given a place in one's theological system, even if it prove distasteful to human sensibilities.

Besides being a norm for one's faith, Scripture was also a norm for one's manner of life. Calvin even went so far as to forbid, on scriptural grounds, the observance of holidays in the city of Geneva. This attitude is shared by many, even to this day, especially with regard to the celebration of Christmas. All traditions, customs, and habits of life either stood or fell by Scripture. The question was not, Is it expedient? but, Is it lawful? Not, Does it please me? but, Does it please God?

And then, the Scriptures were indispensable because they constituted the source of our knowledge of God:

"The course which God followed towards His Church from the very first, was to supplement these common proofs by the addition of His Word, as a surer and more direct means of discovering Himself....It was necessary in passing from death unto life, that they should know God, not only as a Creator, but as a Redeemer also; and both kinds of

knowledge they certainly did obtain from the Word...I am only showing that it is necessary to apply to Scripture, in order to learn the sure marks which distinguish God, as the Creator of the world, from the whole herd of fictitious gods... God, the Maker of the world, is manifested to us in Scripture, and His true character expounded, so as to save us from wandering up and down, as in a labyrinth, in search of some doubtful deity."¹

The Scriptures revealed the many-sidedness of God's nature, presenting Him to us as Creator, Redeemer, and Saviour. We are not left in doubt as to what God is like. We do not have to say with Philip, "Show us the Father and it sufficeth us." Our eyes behold Him in His Word and there we perceive His majesty and glory. What a wonderful heritage men possessed in revealed religion! How different from the pagan worshippers who were still groping in darkness for the One of whose Presence they were conscious in their hearts. Scripture came to us from men who had talked with God face to face, who had seen His wonders performed among the people, and had set down in writing the truth which He had revealed to them about Himself.

Scripture is also presented to us by Calvin as being indispensable because it is the foundation upon which

¹Institutes I.vi.1.

our faith is built:

"Furthermore, this place containeth a profitable doctrine, that this is the only foundation of right and true faith, for a man to submit himself to the Scripture, and reverently to embrace the doctrine thereof."¹

Something will be said in a later chapter about the fact that Calvin was strictly a scriptural theologian. However, it should be said here that he based all his doctrines on the Word of God. He had a decided aversion to anything being set up as a doctrine of the Church which was simply an assumption of man's reason or an imagination of man's mind. It was not enough that it should be logical - Was it scriptural? Not only, Is it truth? but, is it scriptural truth? The Christian religion was not an agency for disseminating the amassed facts of the universe and of man; it was a means whereby the soul of man might come into spiritual fellowship with God, the Creator and Redeemer of men. This coveted fellowship could only be based on thoughts and ideas which God meant for us to possess and which He had placed for our edification in the Holy Scriptures.

No man needed to feel ashamed of his faith because it rested upon Scripture. Worldly wisdom was not

¹Commentary on Psalm cxix.130.

superior but inferior to revealed religion. Of course, one was considered more intellectual by men of the world if one founded one's system of belief upon proved facts and principles which were scientifically verifiable, but it were better to please God than men. Earthly knowledge only brought one into a place of twilight and bewilderment, while the Word of God led men to the clear light of the Gospel, and into a feeling of certainty which no man could give or take away:

"Even our faith, because founded upon the sacred word of God, is superior to the whole world, and is able from its height to look down upon such mists."¹

The Scriptures are also the source of true religion. Here, religion is distinguished from doctrine in that it has to do more with the outward expression of men's thoughts toward God than their inward beliefs. For instance, the form of worship most pleasing to God could only be learned in Scripture:

"It ought then to be especially noted, that the prophet sets here the word of God before us, in order to show that true religion is founded on the obedience of faith, and that God cannot be truly worshipped, except when He Himself teaches His people, and prescribes to them what is necessary to be done. Hence, when the will of God is revealed to us, we can then truly worship Him.

¹Institutes I.xviii.3.

When the Word is again taken away, there will indeed be some form of divine worship; but there will be no genuine religion, such as is pleasing to God."¹

If religion were as important as men believed it to be, then every precaution should be taken to guarantee its proper expression. God had not only told us about Himself in Scripture, but He had told us how we should approach Him, and in what attitude of mind and heart we should pray.

One is able to detect here a feeling that men are dependent upon Scripture for the high ideals and moral purposes which should govern their daily lives. The worship of God was not confined to the formal worship of the sanctuary but expressed itself in our relationships with our fellow-beings whom God has created. Our concern for "one of the least of these" is indicative of our devotion to Him. "Pure religion and undefiled" was caring for the bereaved, the afflicted, the unfortunate, as well as falling upon our knees before God.

Superfluous matters were omitted in Scripture. It confined itself to the essential elements in this religion of truth. It was when men turned from the Sacred Book to man-made doctrines that frivolity and useless

¹Commentary on Minor Prophets, Vol.III, p.257.

notions crept in. As long as we kept our heart's attention only upon that which God had revealed, we were safe from the intrusion of any extraneous matter:

"But Scripture will not have us to feed on frivolous and unprofitable notions; it teaches only what avails to promote true religion."¹

"If true religion is to beam upon us, our principle must be, that it is necessary to begin with heavenly teaching, and that it is impossible for any man to obtain even the minutest portion of right and sound doctrine without being a disciple of Scripture."²

Calvin strikes at the failure of the Papists here also. They had come to follow their own ideas to such a large extent that the whole Church, both ecclesiastics and laity, were being robbed of true religion. No man or group of men could serve two masters. Their attempt at a dual allegiance was a complete failure. Not only were those in positions of high authority suffering from neglect of Scripture, but the masses who hungered for the Word, were cut off from it and permitted to suffer:

"The true religion which is delivered in the Scriptures, and which all ought to hold, they (the heads of the Roman Church) readily permit both themselves and others to be ignorant of, to neglect and despise."³

¹Commentary on Jeremiah xxiii.24.

²Institutes I.vi.2.

³Letter to Francis, Institutes, Vol.I.

Calvin always had the best interests of the people at heart and it grieved him ^{not a} no little that the Church, the very institution which was supposed to feed them with heaven-sent sustenance, should starve them with earthly chaff. How could anything but a corrupt and decaying moral order be expected?

Scripture would always be indispensable as long as it was the great guide and teacher of mankind:

"For by the Scripture as our guide and teacher, He (God) not only makes those things plain which would otherwise escape our notice, but almost compels us to behold them; as if He had assisted our dull sight with spectacles."¹

Human beings are so prone to be materially-minded that the Scripture has been placed before us as a teacher and guide to our frailty. Its message is presented to us with compelling force, its truths are set forth in their true proportions, and facts which we might possibly pass over stand out in bold relief.

On two occasions Calvin likens the Scriptures to spectacles, viz., in the quotation above and the one which now follows:

"For as the aged, or those whose sight is defective, when any book, however fair, is set before them, though they perceive that there is something written, are scarcely able to make out

¹From Argument at beginning of Commentary on Genesis.

two consecutive words, but when aided by glasses, begin to read distinctly, so Scripture, gathering together the impressions of Deity, which, till then, lay confused in our minds, dissipates the darkness, and shows us the true God clearly. God therefore bestows a gift of singular value, when, for the instruction of the Church, He employs not dumb teachers merely, but opens His own sacred mouth; when He not only proclaims that some God must be worshipped, but at the same time declares that He is the God to whom worship is due; when He not only teaches His elect to have respect to God, but manifests Himself as the God to whom this respect should be paid."¹

In these two quotations, we see the teaching office of the Scriptures divided into two phases: first, that of riveting our attention upon that which we may well see, in order that we may grasp its true significance for our lives; and second, giving sight to our blinded eyes that we may see more clearly those truths upon which our faith is founded, which truths are now only dimly and partially seen. The fact that all men worshipped something showed that they were conscious of some being to whom worship was due. It mattered not where men were found, whether in highly civilized countries or in the dense jungles of Africa, they bowed themselves down to a god of some description. The Scriptures, coming to these who feel God's presence but know not His nature, would serve as spectacles, clarifying their vision and revealing a Father who was at once Creator

¹Institutes I.vi.1.

and Redeemer. If this is true, and who can deny it, is it any wonder that Calvin was so anxious for all people to possess the Bible? Even as God's Word became flesh and was the Light of the world, turning men from darkness to eternal day, so His written Word was an instrument which pierced the clouds surrounding His Person, revealing His majesty to all the sons of men.

Still further, Calvin shows us that Scripture is indispensable because it is a mirror which reflects our true natures:

"Under...blinding influences" man "thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think," but "he may see himself as he really is, by looking into the faithful mirror of Scripture."¹

When men compare themselves with other men they find it very easy indeed to become contented with their present status. They may be worse than some, but surely they are better than others by far, and as long as they measure up to the average they have nothing about which to be concerned. The Pharisee looked about on his fellow creatures and thanked God that he was not like other men; the Publican fixed his attention upon God and said, "Lord, be merciful to me the sinner." It was only when King Uzziah had died that Isaiah saw the Lord "high and lifted up",

¹Institutes II.ii.11.

and it was then that he said, "Lo, I am a man of unclean lips." Calvin was convinced that this was the sort of service which Scripture rendered to all who could read, and he considered this to be invaluable. But men were able to see in this mirror of God's Word, not only what they were, men of sin, weakness, and cowardice, but what they might become, men of moral integrity, spiritual strength, and Christian fortitude. Scripture was at once a rebuke and an inspiration. The things which men condemned in scriptural characters, were the things which, very probably, they might find in themselves, and the characteristics of scriptural men and women which they profoundly admired, were the very characteristics which they might themselves possess. Scripture not only pointed out the right way to go but presented One who clothed men with the necessary power and strength that they might be able to go in this right way. No man could look into this Mirror without experiencing a change in his heart and in his life.

Besides reflecting the true state of men, the Scriptures reflected the true state of the Church:

"Moreover, the Holy Spirit here places a mirror before us, in which we may contemplate the state of the Church as it appears in the world."¹

¹Commentary on Genesis xxxiii.6.

Here again, Calvin has in mind the extent to which the Roman Church had wandered away from the principles of the early Church as they are set forth in the New Testament. There seemed to be far more to contrast than to compare. Her practices were foreign to those which characterized the Church in the first century, and the lives of many of her leaders were far different from the lives lived by the apostles in those early days. The Roman Church might well profit by a good look at herself in the mirror provided by God's Word.

Another indispensable feature of Scripture is its function as a burning fire in the hearts of men:

"But it is said that God's Word ought to be unto us as a burning fire, howbeit, not to consume us but to cleanse away all the dross and superfluities that are in us... Therefore, when God purposeth to enflame us with the love of Him, to the end we may be wholly ravished therewith; the same must be done by the means of His Word. But if we cannot abide it, we must needs become as chaff or stubble, according as it is said in the Prophet: 'Shall not my word be a consuming fire, and as a hammer that breaketh the stones, and shall not this people be as chaff?' Thus then ye see how we cannot defeat God's Word of the office that He giveth unto it to be a consuming fire: it must always be so."¹

¹Sermon on Job xx.26-29.

This function, as Calvin makes clear, is three-fold. In the first place, it cleanses our hearts by burning away the dross which so easily accumulates within our spiritual natures. There are the false impressions, the idle words, the desire for vain pleasures, and a fondness for the things of the world, all of which things war against the Spirit and act as a deadening influence upon the spiritual life. In the second place, this burning fire of Scripture sets our hearts aflame with love for God, and turns our deepest devotion towards Him. It causes us to love Him with all our hearts, minds, and souls. In the third place, it consumes those who endeavor to thwart God's purposes and plans. Evil men may read their own condemnation in Scripture as they lay their schemes to defeat the onward movement of God's Kingdom in the earth. As many were unable to abide the day of the coming of the Incarnate Word, so are many unable to abide the preaching of God's written Word. Calvin could see no hope for the reprobate, even though he saw his error in Scripture:

"The Word when addressed to the reprobate, though not effectual for their amendment, has another use. It urges their consciences now, and will render them more inexcusable on the day of judgment."¹

¹Institutes II.v.5.

Therefore, since the Scriptures filled such an important place in the life of the Christian, since it met so many dire needs and perplexing problems, since it ministered to the souls of men in such a tremendous way, Calvin was assured that it was indispensable and, that while men might exist without it, the more abundant life depended upon it.

Chapter VI

THEORY OF ACCOMMODATION

One of the most interesting features of Calvin's doctrine of Holy Scripture is his theory of accommodation. In this theory he sets forth the idea that God takes into consideration our human ignorance and frailty and therefore speaks to us in Scripture in a manner suited to our weakness. One would naturally expect Calvin to arrive at a theory of this kind when one remembers his conceptions of God and of man. Perhaps no man has surpassed him in his desire to exalt the Person of God. He was continually referring to His majesty, His might, His power, His dominion, His holiness. The greatness of God was beyond the highest imagination of men. As they pondered over His attributes they were continually filled with wonder, amazement and admiration. And, on the other hand, perhaps no man has emphasized the sinfulness and low estate of man more than has Calvin. Mankind suffered from total depravity, shared Adam's guilt, was prone to evil; many were reprobate, hopelessly lost in a state of degradation. With these two extremes before him, every act of God toward man was interpreted by him as an act of

gracious condescension.¹ The fact that God had seen fit to reveal Himself to human-kind was a fact which should keep us on our knees continually. Men could never be thankful enough for this invaluable favor. The great Creator and Preserver of the universe had actually spoken to sinful men. The Creator and the created lived in such totally different worlds, they thought such totally different thoughts, they possessed such totally different natures: God was omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent and infinite, while man was ignorant, weak, limited and finite - how could communications pass between them? Of course God could hear and understand our simple prayers to Him but how could we grasp His words when He saw fit to reveal His message to us? There was only one conclusion, viz., that God would use the language of earth so that we would be able to comprehend what He had to say to us.² And Calvin believed that that was exactly what

¹While God dwells in heaven, and is above all heavens, we must avail ourselves of helps in rising to the knowledge of Him; and in giving us symbols of His presence, He sets, as it were, His feet upon the earth, and suffers us to touch them. It is thus that the Holy Spirit condescends for our profit, and in accommodation to our infirmity, raises our thoughts to heavenly and divine things by these worldly elements." Commentary on Psalm cxxxii. 7.

²psaume xlix.4, 'Et de fait, combien que la doctrine céleste à cause de sa majesté et excellence soit fort éloignée de notre sens, toutefois le Saint-Esprit a tellement 'compassé' à notre capacité ses oracles que toute l'Ecriture nous est utile'." J.Chapuis:Le Témoignage du Saint-Esprit dans la théologie de Calvin, p.31.

had taken place. God had not been unmindful of our limitations but had taken every precaution to couch His message in terms and phrases which would be understandable to us:

"God in setting forth His word unto us, hath a regard of our capacity which is very slender, and in the meanwhile reserveth the things to Himself which we could not comprehend as yet, because they were not profitable to our salvation. Not that God taketh pleasure in our ignorance, but because He knoweth what is good for us."¹

Two things are made very clear in the foregoing quotation: in the first place, God has not revealed all truth unto us. Certain high and lofty thoughts he has withheld from us, not because He wishes to keep us ignorant of them but because He hath respect unto our humble capacity. Only after we have put off this mortal body will we be able to know as we are known. One of the inexpressible joys of the life to come is the assurance that we shall attain to fuller knowledge concerning those truths which now we possess only partially. And in the second place, Calvin makes it clear that the knowledge which God has seen fit to bestow upon us is knowledge concerning our salvation. This reinforces the judgment which has already been made, that Calvin regards

¹Sermon on Job xxxiii.8-14.

the Scriptures as being, for the most part, a history of redemption. Matters not pertaining to our salvation have been purposely omitted. Man's chief concern, and God's chief concern for him, was that he might be saved.

It has been pointed out in a previous chapter that Calvin looked upon the Scriptures as a great guide and teacher for mankind. However, it was only this fact of accommodation which made the Book suitable to be used as a book of instruction:

"The truths of revelation are so high as to exceed comprehension; but, at the same time, the Holy Spirit has accommodated them so far to our capacity, as to render all Scripture profitable for instruction."¹

It was the same principle upon which many authors have worked in recent years in publishing children's Bibles or stories of the Bible for young people. Stories from Scripture were selected and told in language which any child could understand. Calvin believed that God had done just this thing for us. Heavenly wisdom and knowledge had been given us in the simplest terms in order that all might grasp their tremendous import. Therefore, Scripture made an ideal book for religious instruction. This conception meets today the demands of the most

¹Commentary on Psalm xlix;4.

modern educational psychology in that it is a pupil-centered type of pedagogy. The truth imparted and the language in which it was phrased were both prepared with the pupil in mind. The teaching began on his level and moved upward as he was able to receive it.

Calvin was conscious of the criticism which the Word received from many quarters and strove to meet all of these objections in this theory of accommodation:

"If God accommodating Himself to the limited capacity of men, speaks in an humble and lowly style, this manner of teaching is despised as being too simple; but if He rise to a higher style, with the view of giving greater authority to His Word, men, to excuse their ignorance, will pretend that it is too obscure. As these two vices are very prevalent in the world, the Holy Spirit so tempers His style as that the sublimity of the truths which He teaches is not hidden even from those of the weakest capacity, provided they are of a submissive and teachable disposition, and bring with them an earnest desire to be instructed."¹

The Scriptures were written for both the beginners and those more advanced, and neither of these groups should criticize the Book if all of it was not to their liking. There were majestic passages which would bring joy to the most discriminating and there were simple portions which the lowliest would appreciate. God had overlooked

¹Commentary on Psalm lxxviii.3.

none in the provisions He had made for our instruction and edification. Calvin seemed particularly anxious to convince the lowly group, whether they were sincere in this modesty or not, that they could understand the Scriptures if they really desired to do so. He even suggested that God had spoken to these as a nurse would speak to babes, in order that they might receive His message:

"For there (in Scripture) God applieth Himself unto our rudeness, He talketh familiarly with us, yea and He lispeth (after a sort) as a nurse would do with her little babes."¹

This line of argument left no one with an excuse. If any man complained of not knowing God's will, it was his own fault and he had only himself to blame. Of course many of the people had been taught by the Catholic Church that they were unable to interpret Scripture and that they must depend upon the Church for their knowledge of it. But Calvin was waging a crusade against any such idea and it was his purpose to place an open Bible in the hands of every person, and with that Bible to impart an assurance to the reader that he was able to read and understand, since God spoke in simple terms and provided His Holy Spirit to illumine and interpret the message.

¹Sermon on Job xxxviii.18-22.

Not less honor, but more honor should be given to God because of the simplicity which characterizes much of His Word. Men who rest their esteem for the Scriptures upon the amount of eloquence which it is able to furnish are guilty of gross impudence:

"Most men have less esteem for the gospel, because they do not find in it a magniloquence which fills their ears. And so they do not deign to occupy themselves in the study of common and lowly doctrine. But such impudence is too bad, that we pay less honor to God when He speaks, because He lets Himself down to our ignorance. Let us know, therefore, that it is on our account that the Lord speaks stammeringly with us in Scripture, rudely and in a vulgar style."¹

Only pride and self-esteem could account for the unbecoming attitude of these critics. It required a man as wise as Solomon to say, "I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in."

Calvin saw in this theory of accommodation a means whereby difficult passages in Scripture might be explained. There were many passages in the Psalms which perplexed him greatly. Even with his willingness to accept anything that God did or said as perfect and right, he could not help but feel that some of the sentiments expressed in

¹Commentary on John iii.12.

the Psalms were not in keeping with his highest conception of God's love and mercy. In such cases his belief in God's method of accommodating Himself to our level of thinking came to the rescue:

"But it has been already stated in a preceding Psalm, and we will have the occasion afterwards frequently to repeat the statement, that the Holy Spirit purposely accommodates to our understanding the models of prayer recorded in Scripture."¹

There are three particular problems which he deals with in this way. The first is the account of Satan's conversation with God in the first part of Job. Speaking of Satan appearing before God with the angels, as recorded in Job ii., he says:

"Not that the thing is done in some place certain: but the Scripture speaketh so, to apply itself to our rudeness...When this is uttered unto us, we must acknowledge that the Scripture applieth itself unto our reason, and that it teacheth us by such means as is most convenient for us, and most agreeable to our understanding."²

The details of this incident were not in harmony with some of Calvin's teaching but he set his mind at rest by saying that the Spirit was merely using terms which

¹Commentary on Psalm xiii.3.

²Sermon on Job ii.1-6.

would be understandable to men. The great truth contained in the passage was in no way disturbed by paying less attention to the details. There were certain ideas and phrases current among God's children in that day and the Spirit had seen fit to use them as channels through which needed truth might be conveyed to them. To have delivered the message in the exact spiritual terms which would have left no doubt as to the absolute truth of each small detail, would have resulted in making it meaningless to the people for whom it was especially given. Calvin believed that the Holy Spirit took it for granted that those who were farther advanced in things of the Spirit would readily make this distinction.

He also explained the scriptural references to idols on this same ground:

"As Scripture, in accommodation to the rude and gross intellect of man, usually speaks in popular terms, so whenever its object is to discriminate between the true God and false deities, it opposes Him in particular to idols; not that it approves of what is taught more elegantly and subtly by philosophers, but that it may the better expose the folly, nay, madness of the world in its inquiries after God, so long as every one clings to his own speculations."¹

To set God over against some heathen idol and argue on

¹Institutes I.xi.1.

His merits is to infer that the idol is of some importance. It frequently appears in Scripture that the sacred writer is conceding too much to his pagan opponent in this regard. If there were but one God, why compare or contrast Him with any idol? It seemed beneath the dignity of the Lord's people to engage in discussions with unbelievers with regard to His place in the universe. And yet, Calvin was sure that the Holy Spirit was only condescending for the time being in order that He might lift their thoughts to a plane where God in His glory reigned supreme and reigned alone.

The third difficulty which he met in this way was with regard to the size of the heavenly bodies:

"It is true, that the other planets are larger than the moon, but it is stated as second in order on account of its visible effects. The Holy Spirit had no intention to teach astronomy; and in proposing instruction meant to be common to the simplest and most uneducated persons, He made use by Moses and the other prophets of popular language, that none might shelter himself under the pretext of obscurity, as we will see men sometimes very readily pretend an incapacity to understand, when anything deep or recondite is submitted to their notice. Accordingly, as Saturn though bigger than the moon is not so to the eye owing to his greater distance, the Holy Spirit would rather speak childishly than unintelligently to the humble and unlearned."¹

¹Commentary on Psalm cxxxvi.7.

Here, Calvin points out that the Spirit is speaking in the language of appearances. To have inferred that the moon was smaller than other heavenly bodies would have given occasion for doubts among the people in that day. They had no way of arriving at the sizes of the various planets except by judging from the way they appeared. God created the heavenly bodies and He spoke the words which constitute our Scriptures; therefore there was no reason to believe that He was ignorant of these things.

It is interesting to note that Calvin is here accepting the findings of science. He does not question its verdicts in the least, nor does he close his eyes to the things which were being discovered continually. His effort is not to suppress but to harmonize. He saw no alternative before him - choose ye this day whom you will serve, scientific accuracy or scriptural infallibility - but with his theory of accommodation he was able to embrace both with complete satisfaction.

These considerations and others which will be mentioned now show very distinctly that Calvin was not a consistent literalist. He would never agree upon a literal interpretation of a passage if that passage ran counter to one of his cherished doctrines. For instance, his exalted conception of God ruled out any anthropomorphic

ideas concerning Him. When he ran across scriptural allusions to God's eyes, mouth, etc., he was sure that this was an unmistakable evidence of accommodation:

"The Anthropomorphites also, who dreamed of a corporeal God, because mouth, ears, eyes, hands, and feet, are often ascribed to Him in Scripture, are easily refuted. For who is so devoid of intellect as not to understand that God, in so speaking, lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children? Such modes of expression, therefore, do not so much express what kind of a being God is, as accommodate the knowledge of Him to our feebleness. In doing so, He must, of course, stoop far below His proper height."¹

Mankind lived in a physical world and physical terms were naturally more intelligible to him. These physical terms were by no means ends in themselves but stepping stones to an adequate appreciation and understanding of God's nature. It was well for man to learn about God through the use of these figures but his knowledge would only be acceptable in so far as he realized the terms were figurative and symbolical rather than literal.

Calvin also used the accommodation theory to account for the manner in which angels were described in Scripture:

"It is certain that spirits have no bodily shape, and yet Scripture, in accommodation to us, describes them under the form of winged Cherubim and Seraphim; not without

¹Institutes I.xiii.1.

cause, to assure us that when occasion requires, they will hasten to our aid with incredible swiftness, winging their way to us with the speed of lightning."¹

He was not objecting to the presence or reality of angels or the ministry which God ordained them to fulfill but it was the mixture of the physical with the spiritual in describing them that called in his famous theory.

When he came to Isaiah xl.12, ("Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?") he saw in it another passage which would suffer from a literalistic interpretation:

"When He names 'measures' which are used by men in very small matters, He accommodates Himself to our ignorance; for thus does the Lord often prattle with us, and borrow comparisons from matters that are familiar to us, when He speaks of His majesty; that our limited and ignorant minds may better understand His greatness and excellence."²

Calvin also uses his theory of accommodation to explain seeming omissions in Scripture. That which had been left out was not overlooked by the Spirit but was

¹Institutes I.xiv.8.

²Commentary on Isaiah xl.12.

purposely omitted, frequently because men were not then able to bear the whole truth. Calvin mentions especially the failure of Moses to mention the angels in his account of the creation and arrives at the conclusion that, on account of human ignorance, he had only mentioned those things which were visible to men:

"For although Moses, in accommodation to the ignorance of the generality of men, does not in the history of the creation make mention of any other works of God than those which meet our eye, yet, seeing he afterwards introduces angels as the ministers of God, we easily infer that He for whom they do service is their Creator."¹

Unlearned men would have found it difficult to accept a belief in beings whose persons they could not see. Moses' object had not been to teach men concerning all the things which God had created but to teach them that all things whatsoever they saw in all the earth were fruits of His creation. Here again we have an element of the most up-to-date educational psychology, viz., to begin the pupil's education with those things in his immediate foreground, things that he can easily see and understand, and then from these move on to things unseen but just as real and powerful.

There are, too, some spiritual truths which are

¹Institutes I.xiv.3.

so majestic that human language is unable to impart them. Accommodation was very essential here:

"Moses says, that God had 'planted', accommodating himself, by a simple and uncultivated style, to the capacity of the vulgar. For since the majesty of God, as it really is, cannot be expressed, the Scripture is wont to describe it according to the manner of men."¹

There are many matters of spiritual import which beggar description and we should not consider that we have learned all there is to know about them when we have read concerning them in Scripture. While Scripture is God's Word, it is necessarily limited to the language used by men, and this language has grown more on the basis of things seen than things unseen, things temporal than things everlasting, things earthly than things heavenly.

But we need not be discontented with this state of affairs. We have all we can properly utilize and all of us are conscious that we do not live up to the light with which we have been blessed. When we have enriched our lives with all there is for us in Scripture, we will then be in a position to ask for more light and more truth.

¹Commentary on Genesis ii.8.

Until then we should strive to appropriate every bit of heavenly knowledge which is presented to us in Scripture and be satisfied, being assured that God knows our capacities and will provide for us according to our needs:

"Let us....be contented with that which He showeth us in the Holy Scriptures: for He knoweth what our understanding can brook."¹

¹Sermon on Job xxxiii.8-14.

Chapter VII

SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE - INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE

Calvin gave frequent expression in his works to his firm belief in the sufficiency of Scripture. God's Word, he declared, was a store-house of religious knowledge and all men might draw upon it freely without fear of exhausting its resources. There was no religious need which could not be satisfied by the message contained therein. There were no restrictions placed upon its abundance; men of all types - the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, those in authority and those of low estate - all might drink deep from this spring of ever-flowing waters.

This estimate was not based upon an experience of little need. Calvin was one whose spiritual nature required much. He had searched the Scriptures diligently for truths which would satisfy the longings of his soul, and he had found them. In times of joy or sorrow, plenty or want, strength or weakness, he had found all those things most needed under those conditions. He had never sought help from the Scriptures and come away empty. When his wife died, he was able to point to Scripture as his unfailing source of comfort and strength.

When the evening shadows began to fall upon his own life, he was still clinging to the Word which spoke peace to his soul. He had never found it necessary to go elsewhere for the satisfaction of his needs and it was hard for him to understand those who neglected the Bible in order that they might give more time to the words which mere human beings had penned. The best of these truths which were set forth by men were merely echoes of the Bible itself and Calvin preferred to seek the original source, the fountain-head. To hear God quoted was indeed helpful, but to hear His own voice in Scripture was far better. In fact, it was wicked to seek wisdom elsewhere when the Word had been purposely put before us for our use:

"First of all, let it be held as a settled principle, that whatever we undertake or attempt, without the word of God, must be improper and wicked, because we ought to depend wholly on His mouth. And indeed, if we remember what feebleness of understanding, or rather, what lack of understanding, is found in all mankind, we shall acknowledge that they are excessively foolish who claim for themselves so much wisdom, that they do not even deign to ask at the mouth of God."¹

Calvin believed that the Scriptures furnished men with sufficient knowledge concerning Christ, and that outside

¹ Commentary on Isaiah xxx.1.

of Scripture He could not be fully known:

"First, then, we ought to believe that Christ cannot be properly known in any other way than from the Scriptures."¹

Fullness of life rested upon knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He had sent, and this life-giving knowledge was contained in Scripture and in Scripture alone. The stories which the Evangelists furnished us in the Synoptic Gospels gave us a life-size picture of Christ, the Saviour of men, and Calvin believed that each separate writer was given a particular portion of the great story to set down in writing. God had made ample provision for us in this regard. Since Christ was not a way but the way, then all men must have adequate understanding of His life and teaching, and this had been supplied abundantly.

The Scriptures also included all the knowledge men needed with regard to right living. One had no excuse for living immorally, for the highest ethical and moral standards known to man were set forth in God's Word. Calvin never minimized the importance of morality but he always presented it as being one of the fruits of Christianity rather than the essence of Christianity itself. The Christian religion was not a way of life but

¹Commentary on John, Vol. I, p.218.

a relationship - a relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and the individual soul. Good works constituted an expression of, rather than a means to, salvation. Men were able to live morally through no merit of their own but because One had been enthroned in their hearts Who was living through them. And so we are not surprised to find these two ideas, morality and faith joined in Calvin's writings:

"I confess that both the whole rule of right living, and also instruction in faith, are most fully delivered in the sacred Scriptures, to which nothing without criminality, can be added, from which nothing can be taken away. I therefore detest all of men's imagining which they would obtrude upon us as articles of faith and bind upon our consciences by laws and statutes. And thus I repudiate in general whatever has been introduced into the worship of God without authority from the word of God."¹

The sufficiency of Scripture was inclusive of all those things needed by men in their spiritual growth, and exclusive of all matters which were extraneous and beside the point. Nothing need be added; nothing must be taken away. In his Commentary on John xx.9, he affirms that the Scripture is so full and complete in every part that any defect in our faith is to be ascribed to our

¹Calvin's Tracts, Vol. II, p.133.

ignorance of Scripture. On Acts xvii.11, he says that we are to hold it as a fixed axiom that no doctrine is worthy of faith if we do not find it supported by Scripture. If we feel that we require some doctrine which we have not discovered in Scripture, it is a sure sign that our knowledge of Scripture is incomplete or faulty; or, on the other hand, if we have been fostering a doctrine which we do not find based upon Scripture, then we need to get rid of it hurriedly.

This sufficiency of Scripture did not preclude the necessity for expositors of the Word. There were some who had spent most of their lives seeking more knowledge from its pages and Calvin felt that it was entirely proper for them to share this knowledge and spiritual understanding with those not so well versed:

"Although the Holy Scriptures contain a perfect doctrine, to which nothing can be added - our Lord having been pleased therein to unfold the infinite treasures of His wisdom - still every person, not intimately acquainted with them, stands in need of some guidance and direction, as to what he ought to look for in them, that he may not wander up and down, but pursue a certain path, and so attain the end to which the Holy Spirit invites him."¹

This is, to a great extent, the work to which Calvin had

¹From Subject of the Present Work, prefixed to the French edition of the Institutes, Vol. I, published in Geneva, 1545.

dedicated himself. His many volumes are not a witness to the insufficiency of Scripture, but to their sufficiency. Nothing needed to be added but much needed to be explained. In fact, it was his purpose in the many volumes which issued from his pen to prove to men that all their needs and requirements had been abundantly met within the covers of the Sacred Book. Intellectual, moral, and spiritual questions all had their answer in Scripture.

Calvin freely admitted that the Scriptures were silent on many points but persistently contended that these things had little or no bearing on our lives. God had no intention of feeding the fires of curiosity and had purposely omitted many things. Surely none but a blasphemous person would attempt to pry into all the acts of the Almighty. Speaking of those who say, "I believe it not, for it passeth my understanding," Calvin wrote:

"Thou vile toad, darest thou blaspheme
God after that sort, because He gives
thee not an account of all His doings?"¹

Men found it so mjch easier to spend their time in speculating on the origin of Cain's wife, or the details of Satan's fall instead of working constantly to shape their hearts and lives after the will of the Lord which

¹Sermon on Job xxxiii.8-14.

had plainly been set forth in Scripture. They were so much like Moses, grieving over what they didn't have and all the while failing to use what they did have. "I am not eloquent; they will not hear me; who am I to undertake such a task?" In this manner did Moses meet God's call to service. "What is that in thine hand?" asked the Lord. It is always the man who is faithful with little who is made ruler over much. Why should men pass over all the useful doctrines of Scripture in a vain effort to learn more about things with which they had little concern?

"Some murmur because the Scripture does not in various passages give a distinct and regular exposition of Satan's fall, its cause, mode, date, and nature. But as these things are of no consequence to us, it were better, if not entirely to pass them in silence, at least only to touch lightly upon them. The Holy Spirit could not deign to feed curiosity with idle, unprofitable histories. We see it was the Lord's purpose to deliver nothing in His sacred oracles which we might not learn for edification."¹

Calvin had not forgotten that it was the desire to know more than God had ordained that brought about the downfall in Eden. All men seemed to have inherited this weakness from their first parents and were continually reaching out for those things which were either directly forbidden by a distinct command, or indirectly forbidden

¹Institutes I.xiv.16.

by omitting any mention of them in Scripture. Calvin felt that it was his sacred duty to warn men of this evil tendency and he had no hesitancy in declaring such a tendency to be perverse and injurious:

"But this warning must always be borne in mind, that we should be soberly wise in those points, the certain knowledge of which cannot be elicited from Scripture; for our curiosity is not only frivolous, but also perverse and injurious, when we desire to know more than God has revealed."¹

Throughout

All during our Lord's earthly ministry people were coming to Him with idle questions, diligently seeking to know things which in no way concerned them. Paul found the people in Athens walking about the market place desiring to hear some new thing. It was a continual ingathering of information but never an output of constructive activity. Like the Dead Sea, they had received much but had distributed nothing, and now they were lifeless creatures, making no contribution to the world. It was our duty to be contented with that which God had delivered unto us:

"Yet must we hold ourselves contented in that God teacheth us by His Word, without any longing for new visions, as many wandering spirits do, which would that angels should come down

¹Commentary on Harmony of the Pentateuch, Leviticus viii.10.

from heaven, and bring them some new revelations. But herein they do God great wrong, for that they content not themselves, in that God hath showed Himself so familiarly unto us. For seeing that we have the Holy Scripture, it is certain that we cannot want anything. And above all things in this brightness of the gospel, we have a perfection of wisdom."¹

"But it is better to leave as we find them, those things which the Spirit of God has not revealed."²

"But let us content us with the Holy Scripture, seeing that God hath enclosed us within the bounds thereof."³

Such quotations might be multiplied indefinitely. Any one of them gives us the heart of his idea. God was Sovereign and His will must be respected in the slightest detail. Everything he did, and everything He did not do, was purposive. To seek to know what was omitted was as wicked as disregarding what was included. This had been his feeling from the very first.⁴ Curiosity concerning these omitted things was a form of distrust. It implied that

¹Sermon on Job iii.12-19.

²Commentary on Genesis xix. 12.

³Sermon on Job iii.12-19.

⁴"Déjà dans la Confession de foi de 1536, citée plus haut, nous avons vu Calvin déclarer ne 'vouloir recevoir autre doctrine que celle que est enseignée par la Parole de Dieu pour le gouvernement spirituel des fidèles.'" J. Chapuis: Le Témoignage du Saint-Esprit dans la théologie de Calvin, p. 27.

God had not done for us all that He should have done. It implied that we needed something with which He had not supplied us. Any implications of this sort were exceedingly distasteful to Calvin, especially since it was his abiding conviction that we possessed far more than we could ever deserve, and that much of our time should be spent in rendering thanksgiving to God for the abundance of our unmerited blessings.

Calvin was confident that the Papists had suffered greatly from their unwillingness to confine themselves to the deliverances of Scripture. Speaking of the Pope's belief that the Scriptures lacked much that would be profitable to the Church, and that the Holy Spirit dictated new articles to the Roman Church, Calvin says:

"Forasmuch then as the Pope and all his hangers on, have not held themselves to the pureness (completeness) of the Holy Scripture: God hath undoubtedly blinded them in their own follies, and we see some among them to be so dull and brutish....as to worship stones.... And this cometh of the devilish curiosity, that they be not contented to be taught simply by the Holy Scripture."¹

No one can doubt that had the Romanists confined themselves to the teachings of the Scriptures the Protestant revolt would never have taken place. It was when men like Luther

¹Sermon on Job iii.12-19.

and Calvin read their Bibles that they began to realize keenly that something of a serious nature had befallen the Church. They were not disloyal to the Church, but more loyal to the Holy Scriptures. They struck telling blows, not at the Church which is the Body of Christ, but at the parasitic customs and practices which had grown up around it. They were not trying to overthrow it, but to purify it. All men were able to see, if they would, that the errors of Rome were traceable to her neglect of Scripture:

"For, since God makes known His will clearly in the Scriptures, the want of acquaintance with them is the source and cause of all errors."¹

They might have been excusable if the Sacred Book had been a closed volume to them, but instead of that, it lay open before them and they bore the responsibility of proclaiming its truths to the people. This responsibility they had woefully neglected and now both the leaders and the led had fallen into tragic error.

These evidences of falling away on the part of the Papacy, caused Calvin to declare that they had lost all semblance to Christianity. It may have been religion, but it certainly was not the religion of Christ. It may have been a church, but it had few marks of the

¹Commentary on Harmony of Synoptic Gospels, Vol. III, p. 50.

Church our Lord established:

"I deny that those assemble in the name of Christ who, disregarding His command by which He forbids anything to be added to the word of God or taken from it, determine everything at their own pleasure, who, not contented with the oracles of Scripture, that is, with the only rule of perfect wisdom, devise some novelty out of their own head, (Deut.iv.2; Rev.xxii.18.)"¹

For one who loved the Church and who had given himself wholly to its service, this was cause enough for great distress.² Since these reformers were unable to make any headway in purging the Church from within, only one course lay before them, viz., that of breaking away and establishing churches which would be Christian in every sense of the word - churches founded upon the all-sufficient Word of God. And that is why Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli were such students of the Bible - they desired to follow its mandates implicitly and to lead their followers into a greater appreciation of its meaning and worth.

¹Institutes IV.ix.2.

²"Je confesse que tant la règle de bien vivre que l'instruction de la foi sont contenues en l'Ecriture sainte, voire en toute perfection, tellement qu'il n'est licite de rien ajouter ni diminuer. Sur quoi je déteste tout ce que les hommes ont dressé de leur invention propre, tant pour en faire articles de foi que pour obliger les consciences à leurs lois et status. Et en général je rejette toutes les facons de faire qu'on a introduites pour le service de Dieu sans l'autorité de sa parole, comme sont toutes les cérémonies de la papauté." Oeuvres Choisies de Calvin, p. 380.

Calvin realized that, in this matter of being content with what God had been pleased to reveal to us in Scripture, one might go too far. That is, one might begin to put a premium on ignorance. Some were inclined in this direction already and seemed to feel that the less they knew, the less would be expected of them. Men dreaded the light because their deeds were evil. As long as they were blissfully ignorant they felt free to indulge their passions and throw restraint to the winds. The masses in the Roman Church had ignorance of the Scriptures forced upon them by their superiors and little could be expected of them. But those under Protestant influence had been urged to read the Sacred Book and were continually being given Commentaries as helps to a better understanding of it. A proper modesty in refusing to go beyond the deliverances of Scripture was desirable, but one must guard against a satisfied ignorance concerning truths which had been delivered:

"Let us, I say, allow the Christian to unlock his mind and ears to all the words of God which are addressed to him, provided he do it with this moderation, viz., that whenever the Lord shuts His sacred mouth, he also desists from inquiry. The best rule of sobriety is, not only in learning to follow wherever God leads, but also when He makes an end of teaching, to cease also from wishing to be wise. The danger which we dread is not so great that we ought on account of it to turn away our minds from the oracles of God.

There is a celebrated saying of Solomon, 'It is the glory of God to conceal a thing,' (Prov.xxv.2.) But since both piety and common sense dictate that this is not to be understood of everything, we must look for a distinction, lest under the pretence of modesty and sobriety we be satisfied with a brutish ignorance. This is clearly expressed by Moses in a few words, 'The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children forever,' (Deut.xxix.29.)"¹

Christ had said on one occasion to his hearers that if they had not heard His teaching they had not sinned but now that they had heard it, to ignore it and live counter to it, involved one in condemnation. This was the truth Calvin endeavored to impress upon the people of his day. Ignorance of God's will was always inexcusable wherever an open Bible was to be found.

A great responsibility therefore rested upon all those unto whom the Gospel had come. Going upon the theory that all things had been excluded from Scripture which did not concern us, and that all things had been included which deeply concerned us, Calvin naturally felt that we were obligated to discover and appropriate the whole content of the Book:

"Whatever, then, is recorded in Scripture, let us take pains in learning it. For it would be to insult the Holy Spirit if we

¹Institutes III.xxi.3.

should think that He taught anything which it does not at all concern us to know."¹

After discussing the extent to which God's will is carried out in human affairs, Calvin writes:

"Those to whom this seems harsh had better consider how far their capaciousness is entitled to any toleration, while, on the ground of its exceeding their capacity, they reject a matter which is clearly taught by Scripture, and complain of the enunciation of truths, which, if they were not useful to be known, God never would have ordered His prophets and apostles to teach."²

The very presence of any truth in Scripture witnessed to our need for it. Therefore, the words of our Lord, "Search the Scriptures," were given an added importance by this doctrine set forth by Calvin.

¹Commentary on Romans xv.4.

²Institutes I.xviii.4.

Chapter VIII

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS CONTRASTED

When one considers the various phases of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture, one is probably justified in supposing that Calvin would recognize no differences between the two Testaments. But upon turning to the second book of his "Institutes" we find an entire section given over to the differences which he has discovered. They are not differences such as discrepancies but "pertain rather to the mode of administration, than to the substance."¹ They are differences which the Scripture itself sets forth and "derogate nothing from the unity already established."² It will be remembered that in another chapter we saw how Calvin boldly proclaimed the consistency and unity of all Scripture. The same God spoke in Genesis who spoke in Matthew, and so on. He here maintains this same position and declares that Christ is the foundation of the promises of both Testaments. He is the key to the whole Book.

Calvin mentions five differences which he finds

¹Institutes II,xi.1.

²Ibid.

set forth in Scripture and explains each of them. The first difference he mentions is this:

"Although it was always the will of the Lord that the minds of His people should be directed, and their hearts elevated, towards the celestial inheritance, yet, in order that they might be the better encouraged to hope for it, He anciently exhibited it for their contemplation and partial enjoyment under the figures of terrestrial blessings. Now, having by the gospel more clearly and explicitly revealed the grace of the future life, He leaves the inferior mode of instruction which He used with the Israelites, and directs our minds to the immediate contemplation of it." ¹

For instance, Calvin shows that Canaan was always set before the children of Israel as the future happy land to which they would some day go. They looked forward to this good day and made their plans with that in view. In moments of distress and discouragement it was their one hope and source of joy. This, of course, was only a figure of heaven. When they did come into the promised land of Canaan, banishment to foreign nations was the threat continually held up before them as the just penalty for their sins. This, naturally, was a symbol of hell. They were being led on by these pictures and symbols until the time when

¹Institutes II.xi.1.

all things would be made clear. This was a dispensation in which it would have been very unwise to reveal all things just as they were. This was only the preparation for the fuller knowledge which was to follow. They now see in the blessings and cursings of Moses the foregleam of the rewards and punishments which God would some day bestow upon them.

Now Calvin made it clear that the Israelites were very conscious that these things were symbols and symbols only. They did not count the land of Canaan as their supreme and ultimate blessing. "They contemplated, as in a mirror, the future inheritance which they believed to be prepared for them in heaven."¹ There were some religious groups in Calvin's day who claimed that the Israelites could see no further than these symbolic figures, but against these Calvin launches a vigorous argument. Symbols were not meant to blind but to make clear.

Calvin shows that this similitude appears more fully in the Epistle to the Galatians. The Jewish nation is here compared to a young heir who is instructed by a tutor until he is old enough to see things for himself. This, Paul shows, is the function

¹Institutes II,xi.1.

which the ceremonies of Israel have fulfilled. God had the same blessings awaiting them which He now has for us but they were at that time incapable of possessing and managing them:

"Therefore, when He admitted Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with their posterity, to the hope of immortality, He promised them the land of Canaan as their inheritance; not that their hopes might terminate in that land, but that in the prospect of it they might exercise and confirm themselves in the hope of that true inheritance which was not yet visible..... Abraham is not permitted to grow indolent after having received a promise of the land, but a greater promise elevates his mind to the Lord. For he hears Him saying, 'Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.'¹

God had also drawn David above temporary blessings to higher and ultimate felicity. After deep spiritual experiences with Him, he was able to say: "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord," (Ps. lxxxiv.2;) "God is my portion forever," (Ps. lxxiii. 26;) "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot," (Ps.xvi.5;) and "I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living," (Ps. cxlii.5.) Calvin adds:

¹II,xi,2.

"Persons who venture to express themselves thus, certainly profess that in their hopes they rise above the world and all present blessing." ¹

Of course the saints in the Old Testament put more emphasis upon mortal life than the saints in the New Testament but that was to be expected since we remember that life eternal would naturally be more real to men after the resurrection of Christ than before. The people of the Old Testament looked toward immortality as a blessed promise; the people of the New experienced its reality in the presence of the Risen Lord.

Calvin makes haste to say that these two methods do not imply two Gods. This was the argument of the Manichaeans. To them, the God of the Old Testament was different from the God of the New:

"But we shall easily get rid of such difficulties, if we direct our attention to that dispensation of God, which I have observed; namely, that during that period, in which He gave the Israelites His covenant, involved in some degree of obscurity, He intended to signify and prefigure the grace and future of eternal felicity by terrestrial blessings, and the grievousness of spiritual death by corporal punishments." ²

¹II,xi,2.

²Institutes II,xi,3.

It was not necessary that God should do the same things at all times, and use the same methods on all occasions, in order to be immutable. Different ages and varying circumstances called for various methods of procedure. The dispensation of Israel called for corporal punishment because the race was in its infancy and could not be easily reasoned with. They grew in knowledge and understanding during the centuries and finally in New Testament times He was able to punish with far less severity and frequency and in an altogether different manner.

The second difference between the Testaments also has to do with figures. The Old Testament,

"in the absence of the truth, displayed merely an image and shadow instead of the body; but" the New Testament "exhibits the present truth and the substantial body."¹

This is made plain in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The author shows how that all the priests in Israel were figures of the Great High Priest who was to come. These former priests held office only temporarily, they were continually succeeding one another; Christ's priesthood was eternal. Former priests were sinful; Christ was sinless. Former priests pointed men to God; Christ revealed the Father's presence. The sacrifice of Israel had been animals; the sacrifice

¹Institutes II,xi,4.

offered in the New Testament was the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world.

Calvin would not agree that the new covenant was a different covenant. The covenant which God had made with the patriarchs of old was the same covenant which was now established and ratified in Christ. The ceremonies had been symbols of its confirmation, since men were not able to see the actual confirmation of it in Christ. The truth of it was now sealed with Christ's blood and in that sense it became a New Testament.

In the Old Testament, the Jews had been conducted to Christ by the teaching of the law. They were heirs of this great blessing, but because they were yet young, they must remain under the divinely provided tutor:

"For it was reasonable that before the Sun of Righteousness was risen, there should be neither such a full blaze of revelation nor such great clearness of understanding. Therefore the Lord dispensed the light of His word to them in such a manner, that they had yet only a distant and obscure prospect of it."¹

Christ Himself had said, "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached." Moses and the prophets were able to lift the curtain partially and give their contemporaries

¹Institutes II,xi,5.

a glimpse into the far distant future, when He should appear, but those who lived in the days of the New Testament were able to behold His glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

The third difference between the Testaments

"is taken from Jeremiah, whose words are these: 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband to them, saith the Lord; but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.'"¹

Paul enlarges on this when he calls the law a literal, the gospel a spiritual doctrine; the law was engraved on stones but the gospel was inscribed on the heart; the law was the preaching of death, the gospel endowed one with life, etc. No one was able to fulfill the law and yet if he sinned against a part of it he was guilty toward the whole of it. Death was inevitable. The gospel presented One who fulfilled the

¹Institutes II,xi,7.

law in its entirety and infused His followers with an imparted strength which made them more than conquerors.

The fourth difference grows out of the third:

"For the Scripture calls the Old Testament a covenant of bondage, because it produces fear in the mind; but the New it describes as a covenant of liberty, because it leads the heart to confidence and security." ¹

Here again Calvin refers to Paul's use of Hagar and Sarah as illustrative of the difference between the children who are born in bondage and can never attain to the inheritance, and the children who are born free with the right of inheritance. The Law subjected men to slavery, while the gospel regenerates to liberty:

"Now the whole may be summed up thus- that the Old Testament filled men's consciences with fear and trembling; but that by the benefit of the New Testament, they are delivered, and enabled to rejoice." ²

In the old dispensation, the law continually hung over men's heads threatening them with punishment of a corporal kind if they did not obey, In the new dispensation, the gospel frees men from their former shackles and points them to an incorruptible crown, a house not made with hands, a land of fadeless day.

¹Institutes II,xi,9.

²Ibid.

And then, the fifth difference in the Testaments is this:

"That till the advent of Christ, the Lord selected one nation, to which He would limit the covenant of His grace....But when the fulness of the time was come....the barrier was demolished, which had so long confined the divine mercy within the limits of the Jewish church, and peace was announced to them who were near, that being both reconciled to God, they might coalesce into one people." ¹

The whole history of the Old Testament centered around the children of Israel as the chosen people of God. The heathen nations were excluded from the fold and permitted to remain in the darkness of sin. No particular effort seemed to have been put forth in order to convince them that Jehovah was the one and only true God. Of course there were occasions when they gave courageous expression to their convictions, as for instance at Mt. Carmel, but on those occasions the purpose appeared to be more in the line of winning an argument than in bringing about the conversion of their opponents. In the New Testament the doors are swung open to the whole world. "And, I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." The Jews found it an unpleasant task. It was a hard doctrine for them. The gospel was now to be preached

¹Institutes II,x1,11.

to all nations.

And now, we have seen that Calvin admits only the differences between the Testaments which are set forth in Scripture itself. These differences were ordained of God and in perfect keeping with all the phases of his doctrine of Scripture. Not one of his convictions regarding the Bible has been shaken by his acknowledgment of these differences. He has merely seen God at work in different periods of history and under varying circumstances and he is not surprised in the least that God does not work always in the same way. The very greatness of His nature and his resources, which are inexhaustable, make it certain that His methods will be varied but His plan always one.

Chapter IX

MISCELLANEOUS EVIDENCES OF CALVIN'S HIGH REGARD FOR SCRIPTURE

Besides the specific phases of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture which have been discussed in the preceding chapters, it will add to one's appreciation of his doctrine if he considers some of the various tributes which he paid to Scripture. These tributes fall under no particular heading, but they contribute much to the doctrine as a whole. They are selected from no particular section of his works but are representative of practically all he wrote about the Word of God.

It is interesting to note the various names which Calvin gave to Scripture. All of these are very expressive of his estimate of it, and while these names are indirect tributes, they are tributes none the less. This unconscious witness to the value and nature of Scripture is perhaps even more valuable than the deliberate words which he uttered when discussing the subject. It shows the deep, underlying feeling for Scripture which had its constant abode in his heart of hearts. Very probably the name most frequently used by him was "The Word of God."¹

¹Commentary on Isaiah 1.9, etc.

This phrase has become commonplace in our day and was, without doubt, used widely in Calvin's own day. However, we must not suppose that it was simply a term with him. Everything he said or wrote about Scripture showed that he took the phrase literally. Scripture did not "contain the Word of God" as that expression is used today, but it was the Word of God. Over and over again he takes particular pains to make it clear that he recognizes no human element in the Book. God dictated His message to the selected scribes and they set it down in writing.

He also spoke of the Scriptures as "oracles"¹ or "sacred oracles"². By these terms he testified to his belief in the infallibility of the Word. Much of its content was prophecy, foretelling future events with amazing accuracy. This function of Scripture never failed to arouse Calvin's wonder and admiration.

The name "Sacred History"³ is not uncommon in his writings. His whole doctrine of inspiration gives to these words significant meaning. The Bible was to Calvin authentic history. The incidents recorded were

¹Institutes IV.ix.14.

²Letters of Calvin, Vol.III, p.60.

³Commentary on Psalm xviii.1, cxxxix.17.

not allegories but actual occurrences. Jonah and Job were as historical to him as Charlemagne and William the Conqueror. And then this history was sacred. As has been said before, all history was "His Story." Calvin could see God's hand in all events. All things moved in one mighty procession toward the fulfillment of His will.

Occasionally he mentions the "inspired writings",¹ filling this term with all that he believed about the Scriptures being God-breathed. The human writers were merely the agents, channels, through whom the message flowed to mankind. He speaks of "the Sacred Volume",² the "Sacred Scriptures",³ and, times without number, the "Holy Scriptures." Calvin never feels that he is dealing with an ordinary book. It has an extraordinary Author, presents an extraordinary message, which in turn produces an extraordinary effect upon its readers.

Calvin also bore testimony to his acceptance of the whole of Scripture:

"Our true wisdom is to embrace with meek docility, and without reservation, whatever the Holy Scriptures have delivered."⁴

¹Letter to Francis, Institutes, Vol. I.

²Institutes II.iii.8.

³Commentary on Genesis xxiv. 1.

⁴Institutes I.xviii.4.

There was no place for "mental reservation" in Calvin's approach to Scripture. He had little patience with the idea of choosing those passages of Scripture which one desired to accept. To cast aspersion on any verse of God's Word was to strike at the Whole Book. Any intimation of weakness in any part opened the way for the destruction of the entire volume. The attitude which Calvin thought should possess every individual in the presence of Scripture was the attitude of meekness. This was no place for personal opinion, critical examination, thorough analysis. Any who showed any hesitancy to accept its precepts were immediately branded as blasphemers.

The Scriptures possessed, also, an inestimable depth of meaning:

"Accordingly, I have said that many despise God's Word, because they think it inferior to the acuteness of their own understandings. Yea, many are lead to break forth more audaciously into this heaven-daring contempt, from the vanity of showing their own ingenuity. But, although worldly men may flatter themselves in that proud disdain of the divine law, yet the commendation which the prophet announces upon it still holdstrue, that it comprehends mysteries which far transcend all the conceptions of the human mind."¹

Man's lack of appreciation for Scripture was usually

¹Commentary on Psalm cxix.129.

based upon his ignorance of its meaning. Spiritual matters were only spiritually discerned, and it was ridiculous to see worldly wisdom trying to pass judgment upon the deliverances of Almighty God. The tremendous content of Scripture is ably illustrated by the fact that each succeeding generation gleans new truth from its pages. The combined efforts of all the scholars of the ages have failed to arrive at all God's Word has to offer. One need not approach the Scriptures with a feeling that all its truths have been discovered, but may come with an assurance that there are great truths yet undiscovered and that a deeper insight into matters of a spiritual nature will reward his labors. Indeed, the Book is like a great mine of varied resources: precious gems have been found in it from earliest days, but countless other gems await the patient and painstaking searcher. And so it was unbecoming, to say the least, for men to hold in derision a Book which is so meaningful to those who depend upon the Spirit's illumination, that those who have discovered the most, are the chief exponents of the view that there is an untold wealth of knowledge yet to be discovered.

Calvin believed that the greatest benefit from the reading of Scripture depended upon a deep sense of

reverence for the Divine Author:

"And therefore when we read the Holy Scripture or come to sermon: we must be touched with the majesty of God, to yield Him reverence, so as we defile not His holy truth by esteeming it, as if a man should tell us some merry conceited tale, but rather think thus: Seeing that our maker speaketh unto us, it behooveth all knees to bow before Him, and all men ought to quake at that which He speaketh."¹

Any listlessness or appearance of lack of interest on the part of the hearer when God's Word was being read disclosed an improper conception of the source of Scripture. No one who realized that the great Creator and Redeemer of men was speaking could fail to be impressed and held in awe by the words which were uttered. If the Sacred Book was simply a collection of man-made stories, then lack of interest was permissible. But Calvin believed that every occasion of reading the Scripture was an opportunity for worshipping Him whose Word it was.

We should also reverence the Word and resolve to heed its commands:

"Before the heart can be judged soft and pliable to the hearing of God's word, it is necessary that we receive it with

¹Sermon on Job iii.12-19.

reverence, and with a disposition to obey it...The man who will not suffer himself to be ruled by God's word, makes that heart, which was hard before, harder still, and is convinced as to his own sense and feeling of obstinacy."¹

Calvin considered that it was only a hard heart which could rebel against Scripture, and having once rebelled, each new rebellion contributed to the complete hardening of the heart. The seed which fell upon hard ground took no root because the birds of the heaven quickly devoured it. It was the soil which had been broken up by spiritual experiences that received the seed properly and produced an abundant harvest. Therefore, the right condition of the heart was a matter of great importance and one which should be cultivated by the man conscious of his need for heavenly guidance. Each reception of the Word opened the door a little wider for the reception of more truth, but each time it was rejected, the closing process became a little easier, until finally the entrance of light was an impossibility.

The Word, too, should be received with a humility of spirit:

"So then, we be warned here to keep silence when our Lord sendeth us His word, and both great and small to stoop unto it, and to be dumb but

¹Commentary on Psalm lxcv.8.

not deaf. I say we must be tongue-tied: for when God so speaketh, it standeth us in hand to hearken without replying, and to receive quietly whatsoever is said unto us, and to conclude with Amen, So be it."¹

This was the only conceivable attitude for the creature when spoken to by the Creator. There was no place for reply, dissent, questioning. The words of our Lord should be the law of our lives and His slightest wish our guiding principle. "Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth," was the attitude most acceptable to Calvin, and, according to his view, the attitude most acceptable to God.

There was also a sense in which we should be true to the Word which had been delivered unto us. It was so easy to twist it and interpret it in a way most pleasing to ourselves. This, truly, was the way of popularity with the world, but it was not the way of a genuine prophet of Jehovah:

"All love to be flattered. Hence the majority of teachers, in desiring to yield to the corrupt wishes of the world, adulterate the Word of God. Wherefore, no one is a sincere minister of God's word, but he, who despising reproach, and being ready, as often as it may be necessary, to attack various offences, will frame his method of teaching according to the command of God."²

¹Sermon on Job xxix.8-13.

²Commentary on Genesis xl.16.

This was the problem faced by the prophets of the Old Testament, by John the Baptist and other preachers of the New Testament, and by every minister down through the centuries: Is it better to please God or man? Popularity and prophecy have always run counter to each other. The people, so often want their practices approved rather than corrected, condoned rather than reformed. The preacher and his congregation would always live in the finest harmony as long as he was willing to put the soft pedal on matters which might disturb their peace of mind. The smug complacency of numbers of churches would absolutely refuse to be disrupted. Smooth off the rough edges of Scripture, soften the unwelcome message of discipline, adorn unpleasant truth in an attractive garb, but desist from the plain speech of God's Word. Calvin saw this state of affairs all about him, he anticipated it in future days, and he determined to express his conviction concerning it in no uncertain terms.

Scripture also possessed finality. It was no message for a certain people at a certain time, but a message for all the people all the time:

"But whatever has been declared by Scripture must be regarded as perpetual, and hence necessary."¹

Calvin never looked forward to a time when men might well

¹Institutes II.vii.5.

do without God's Holy Word. It was designed to supply the demands of a perpetual need of mankind. Men would always be human and therefore frail, faulty, and prone to error. The infallible, strengthening Word of the Lord would always be a necessity. Tradition was so changeable; each new generation added to or subtracted from its sum total of facts. There was no element of constancy about it. But God's Word would go on from generation to generation preserving its integrity, and presenting men with the knowledge necessary for the journey from earth to heaven. Neither one jot nor tittle should be removed from it.

Nor was it right for one to say that things might be different from what they are represented to be in Scripture if God so desired. Calvin refers to Augustine's claim that "the Lord was able, if He chose, to raise a mortal man to angelic purity; but that He had never done, and never would do it, because so the Scripture had declared," (Augustine, Lib. de Nat. et Grat.) Calvin adds:

"There is no use in absurdly disputing concerning the power of God in opposition to His truth; and therefore there is no ground for cavilling, when it is said that that thing cannot be, which the Scriptures declare will never be."¹

Suppositions were out of place where God's Word had spoken.

¹Institutes II.vii.5.

What had been said in it was final; like the law of the Medes and Persians, it changed not. To discuss a proposition which incurred the reversal of facts as they were stated in Scripture, was futile, and, to Calvin, wicked, since such a discussion carried with it a subtle inference that conditions set forth in Scripture might be changed.

And certainly the doctrines of Scripture were final. There was no reason to believe that further light would change any decree which was found in Scripture. One could take and appropriate all its deliverances without fear that the onward movement of time would bring something truer and better:

"To be short, let us mark that our Lord hath authorized His Prophets and Apostles, to the end that the doctrine which they have given us should not be doubted of, but be taken as an unrepealable decree."¹

Calvin was willing to rest eternity upon Scripture. Should such an unbelievable thing occur as an addition to the Canon, the content of this addition would only confirm, and be in harmony with, that part of Scripture which had already been received.

Another attribute of Scripture was the fact that it was plain. Here was a message from God which all might

¹Sermon on Job xxxiii.1-7.

understand. Even though its depth of meaning proved puzzling to men of the world, the Holy Spirit was always present with the Christian, leading him into all truth. Calvin could see no reason why God should have spoken if He had not spoken in understandable terms. The Bible was not a book to be worshipped, but to be read, appropriated, and followed. It was of little use to stand in awe before a sacred object unless that object was meaningful:

"Wherefore it is detestable blasphemy against God in that the Papists say, that the Scripture is dark and doubtful. For to what end should God have spoken, unless the plain and invincible truth should show itself in His Words?"¹

The Papists used this argument in reserving interpretation to themselves. The people were given to understand that they were incapable of arriving at the true meaning of Scripture; they must silently receive that which was handed down from the authority of the Church. Calvin considered this an insult, not only to the people, but to God. We have seen how he believed that God had accommodated Himself to the feeble faculties of human-kind and spoken in simple terms, in order that all might have free access to His truth.

¹Commentary on Acts, Vol.II, p.205.

The arrangement of scriptural truth also claimed Calvin's admiration:

"For it is wonderful how much we are confirmed in our belief, when we more attentively consider how admirably the system of divine wisdom contained in it (Scripture) is arranged - how perfectly free the doctrine is from everything that savors of earth - how beautifully it harmonizes in all its parts - and how rich it is in all the other qualities which give an air of majesty to composition."¹

Even though he compared this Book with the best literature of the world, it surpassed all. It not only contained truth, but truth presented in a magnificent way. It was truth for men, but not of men. There was no discord; all was perfect harmony. Each book was like an instrument in a mighty orchestra - all were tuned together and gave forth celestial music. No instrument could be omitted without marring the symphony and any additional instrument might detract from its beauty. No man could afford to close his eyes to the majesty of such a Book.

Nor should it be forgotten that men were dependent upon Scripture for all true wisdom:

"Hence, it follows that all the knowledge and wisdom which men have of their own is vain and unsubstantial; since all true wisdom among men - all that deserves to be so called -

¹Institutes I.viii.1.

consists in this one point, That they are docile, and implicitly submit¹ to the teaching of the Word of God."

When a man closed his mind to Scripture, he robbed himself of a priceless privilege. It mattered not how brilliant a mind he possessed, he could not be wise without Scripture. Not only did men need the truths which were stated in God's Word, but they needed to profit by the experiences of the men and women whose lives were portrayed in Scripture. Men seem to profit little by history. They fall into the same errors which marred the lives of former generations, and rather resent the offer of advice from those of larger experience. The Bible is full of warnings for those who will take heed, and to ignore such warning is sheer folly.

Calvin also honored Scripture because he saw that it partook of the nature of God Himself:

"We indeed know this to be the power of the word, as the apostle teaches in the fourth chapter to the Hebrews: for the word partakes of the nature of God Himself, from whom it has proceeded: and as God is a searcher of hearts, so also the word penetrates to the marrow, to the inmost thoughts of men, and distinguishes between the feelings and the imaginations of men."²

¹Commentary on Psalm lxxiii.16.

²Commentary on Minor Prophets, Vol.II, pp.323,324.

The Word, being the product of God's mind, naturally possessed some of His qualities. Men might deceive themselves about matters of life and conduct, but in the presence of God they saw themselves as they were, and were ashamed. This was exactly what Scripture did - searching men's hearts as they read, it brought to light thoughts and imaginations which they had taken pains to conceal even from their better selves. No man could comfortably read Scripture and remain in his sins. There was something here which at once condemned the evil in him and filled him with a determination to live a different sort of life. Truly God dealt with men through His Word.

Calvin concurred with the Prophet in the opinion that Scripture was similar to wheat, fire, and a hammer:

"He said, first, that God's word was wheat, because souls are nourished by it unto a celestial life; and nothing can be more delightful than this comparison. But now he declares it to be "fire" and a "hammer". There is in these terms some appearance of contradiction; but there is a distinction to be made as to the hearers, for they who reverently embrace the word of God, as it becomes them, and with genuine docility of faith, find it to be food to them; but the ungodly, as they are unworthy of such a benefit, find it to be far otherwise. For the word which is in itself life-giving, is changed into fire, which consumes and devours them; and also it becomes

a hammer to break, to tear them in pieces, and to destroy them."¹

Calvin continually fed his spiritual nature upon the Word and he knew from experience that it was good for food. He had been conscious of the growth of his soul. But, as it is better for men to be ignorant of truth than to spurn it, so the Scripture, if rejected, spelled the doom of the person rejecting it. Jeremiah's presentation of the attributes of Scripture met with Calvin's whole-hearted approval.

Nor was Calvin slow to see that the Word of God was the only sure principle for the regulation of conduct:

"But he (David) brings under their notice a surer principle for the regulation of conduct, when he recommends a deferential regard to God's Word."²

Those moderns who have pitted morality against faith, and who claim that those in past generations were concerned merely with what one believed, not in how one acted, will do well to ponder this quotation from Calvin. He was vitally concerned with the matter of right conduct. John Knox gave a remarkable testimony to the state of morals in the city of Geneva. It appeared to him as a model community, and Calvin was largely responsible for the extent

¹Commentary on Jeremiah xxiii.29.

²Commentary on Psalm lxii.11.

to which this estimate was true. He was as bold as any present-day moral crusader in declaring that one's life must harmonize with one's faith. There was no such thing as faith without works:

"They (hypocrites) have no hesitation in granting that whatever proceeds from the mouth of God is both true and right; this honor they are willing to concede to His Word; but in so far as it proposes to regulate their conduct, and restrain their sinful affections, they dislike and detest it." We can never "listen to it with true docility and meekness of mind, till we have been brought to give ourselves up to be ruled and disciplined by its precepts."¹

In fact, the corruptness of life among many of the Papists was no small factor in precipitating the Reformation. Its purpose was not only to reform doctrine but behavior also. Of course the Bible was not simply a moral code, but, along with multitudes of other things, it did present the finest moral code known to man. Calvin was the last man in the world to ignore this function of Scripture.

All of the foregoing citations may be summed up in a quotation from a section of the Geneva Catechism, for which catechism Calvin was primarily responsible:

¹Commentary on Psalm 1.17.

"M. How are we to use it (Scripture) in order to profit by it?

S. By embracing it with entire heart-felt persuasion, as certain truth come down from heaven - by being docile, and subjecting our minds and wills in obedience to it - by loving it sincerely - by having it once for all engraven on our hearts, and there rooted so as to produce fruit in our life - finally, by being formed after its rule. Then shall it turn to our salvation, as it was intended."¹

¹Calvin's Tracts, Vol.II, p.82.

Chapter X

CALVIN - A SCRIPTURAL THEOLOGIAN

In the preceding chapters we have been discussing various phases of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture. It will be interesting now to look at Calvin, the theologian, and see to what extent he exemplifies, in his own life and work, the principles which he has set forth.

All authors dealing with Calvin and his work agree that he based all that he said or did upon Holy Scripture.¹ He was truly a man of one book - the Bible. His entire life was given to activity which was calculated to give it its rightful place among the people generally. One of the first things which attracted his attention after uniting himself with the Protestant cause, was the need for more knowledge of Scripture among the masses. Of course, even at that time, conditions were far better in this regard than they had been before Luther burned the Papal Bull. Luther had completed his German translation of the Bible and much had been done in France toward making it available for all. But Calvin was far from being satisfied with conditions as

¹"C'est sur la Parole de Dieu, toute entière, que le Réformateur (Calvin) s'appuie dès le début de son oeuvre". Calvin held "que dans la Bible que nous lisons est contenue la vraie et authentique Parole de Dieu, et qu'une transformation substantielle de notre être s'est opérée." J. Chapuis: Le Témoignage du Saint-Esprit dans la théologie de Calvin." pp. 10,12.

they were. He dedicated his life to the cause of making the Scriptures understandable to humble folk who heretofore had depended, like babes, upon the deliverances of the Catholic clergy. Now that they had the Book they hardly knew what to do with it. They had been taught for so long that they were incapable of understanding Scripture that now they actually believed it. They had Calvin's sympathy immediately and with tireless zeal he became a "Minister of the Word" in every true sense of those words. He not only expressed himself as to his estimate of Scripture by writing frequently upon the subject, but by giving of himself unstintingly to the ministry of it.

One of his biographers has not gone far wrong when he allows Calvin's mighty influence down through the years to rest upon his faithfulness to Scripture:

"As Calvin has exercised so mighty an influence for the last three hundred years, so is he still the man who gives life to the age, and by the clearness of his reasonings, by his firm and clear spirit, is restoring us in some measure to order. And we say to the youth of our times, excited by the storms of contending principles, and at a period when so many antichristian movements heap contempt on truth and morality, 'See! here stands that iron man, who never knew throughout his life what doubt was, and who subjected himself like a child to the authority of the Holy Scriptures'."¹

¹Paul Henry: Life and Times of John Calvin, p.329.

It was to the extent to which he had been true to the Word that his message might become a rallying-point for the distorted minds of a disquieted period of history. If it could be shown that he always acted upon the principles of high regard for Scripture which were so characteristic of his teaching, then here was a man to challenge the consideration of any group of sincere seekers after truth. And those who know Calvin best testify that he did not upon his own doctrine and that he was a living example of what he taught. His every action seemed to have been suggested and motivated by scriptural influence.

A tribute which Calvin, on one occasion, made to David, may well be made to Calvin himself:

"Now, as it is certain that David borrows not an artificial rhetoric from the bar, (as profane orators do when they plead their cause,) in order to win the favor of God, but rather draws his arguments from the Word of God, the sentences which he here brings together for the confirmation of his faith we ought to appropriate to our own use."¹

It may be that because Calvin admired this quality in others he determined to exemplify it in his own life. It was evident in his preaching, his teaching, his writings whether letters, tracts, Commentaries or Institutes. Into

¹Commentary on Psalm xxxviii.12.

every argument which he entered he carried with him the Scriptures as his sure defence. He did not depend-upon a cunning tongue, a flow of oratory, appeal to classical authors, or the force of sheer reason, but he allowed his argument to stand or fall upon Scripture. He believed with all his soul that Satan and his cohorts always fled before the face of God's Word. Was not the Word referred to in Scripture as "the sword of the Spirit?" Had not our Lord overcome the Tempter in the wilderness with this peerless weapon? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" and in like manner, if God's Word substantiated his claims, Calvin was sure of glorious victory.

And so we are not surprised at his marked success in rallying the forces of Protestantism. Who could withstand this tremendous volley of scriptural passages, combined with his superb fearlessness? One of Calvin's admirers has well stated the matter when he says:

"No wonder that Rome hates the open Bible and that Protestantism loves the open Bible. God by His word spoke peace to the tortured soul of Luther; filled the cultured souls of Zwingli and Melancthon with blood earnestness; turned the refined, penetrating, profound, but Pharisaic, genius, John Calvin, into the greatest Christian of his day, the bulwark of his truth against all comers, its propagator to the ends of the earth."¹

¹Thomas Cary Johnson: John Calvin and the Genevan Reformation, p. 17.

The Reformation was similar to the occasion in the Old Testament when the Book of the Law was found in the temple after being lost or neglected through long years. It created a sensation and the transforming power of its influence was immediate and widespread. The Papists were helpless since they too held the Bible to be sacred, a gift from God. It is true, they had not used it in this manner, but it was a part of their content of belief, nevertheless. The reformers now met them on their own ground, with their own weapon, and disrupted their ranks irreparably. It was a case of "from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath." The talent had been tied up in a napkin and looked upon as a sacred thing, but other forces, man-made traditions and the like, had crept in and usurped its rightful place. Calvin stood upon the one foundation which they were unable to shake, and he knew it.

Another fact which illustrates Calvin's emphasis upon Scripture is the requirement which he made of all candidates for the ministry. As Pattison says:

"When a minister's place was vacant, (in Geneva,) the candidates were first examined in the interpretation of Scripture. The examination was conducted by the Company of Pastors, but in the presence of (lay) delegates deputed by the Council of State."¹

¹Mark Pattison: Essays, Vol.II, p.24.

If candidates were unable to interpret Scripture, they were unfitted to be pastors. It mattered not how scholarly they were or how well they could speak, the essential thing was the exposition of the Word. Men frequented the churches, not to hear worldly wisdom, but to be fed upon the Bread of Life. They were able to hear the opinions of men every day but when they came to the sanctuary they expected to be taught in the things of God as set forth in His Word.

Calvin did not confine the teachings of Scripture to things of a religious nature only, but applied its truths to every phase of life:

"In his capacity as preacher he applied the truth he found in Scripture to the whole range of human life and activity - to doctrine, to morals, to politics, to education, to marriage and divorce, to the upbringing of children, to dress, to amusements, to everything setting forth the ideal which was realized in Christ and urging his hearers to conform to it."¹

As an illustration of this we have only to look at the government of Geneva which he instituted. Scripture was the law of the city and everything was dealt with on the basis of Scripture teaching. The church was as much a city institution as the town hall. The ministers were as essential to its welfare as the mayor and other officials. We

¹Reyburn: John Calvin, p.342.

hear so much today about the need for uniting religion with life: we have that here in the extreme. There were no such divisions as sacred and secular; everything possessed religious significance. We are not surprised to find that this idea met with strong opposition from many sources, and, as Dr. Mitchell Hunter points out, no smooth road lay ahead of him:

"The relationship between Church and State which Calvin sought to realize could scarcely result otherwise than in their becoming so entangled as they subsequently did."¹

This entanglement turned out to the Church's disadvantage and the last state of affairs was worse than the first.

And now we come to a discussion of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture from the standpoint of Scripture itself. It appears that Calvin's estimate of the Bible is the estimate set forth by the Bible itself. Calvin's view is the one held by scriptural authors throughout Scripture. This is a much debated point and perhaps no definite conclusion can be reached, but the weight of the evidence seems to rest at the present time with those who hold to the statements which have just been made. It is almost impossible to read the prophets of the Old Testament without coming to the conclusion that they considered themselves to be controlled by God for the purpose of delivering His message.²

¹Dr. A. Mitchell Hunter: The Teaching of Calvin, p. 193.

²Jer. i. 9, v. 14; Isa. li. 16, lix. 21; Num. xxi. 35, xxiii. 5, 12, 16; Ezek. iii. 4.

Dr. Warfield believes that:

"It is a process of nothing other than 'dictation' which is thus described (in II Sam.xiv,3,19,) though, of course, the question may remain open of the process by which this dictation is accomplished."¹

Also, he mentions how that in Ex.iv.10-17, and vii.1-7, the Lord is pictured as declaring "that He who made the mouth can be with it to teach it what to speak, and announces the precise function of a prophet to be that he is 'a mouth of God', who speaks not his own but God's words."² He further cites Hermann Schultz, a representative of the "advanced" school, who declares that "The Book of the Law seemed already to the later poets of the Old Testament, the 'Word of God'. The post-canonical books of Israel regard the law and the prophets in this manner. And for the men of the New Testament, the Holy Scriptures of their people, are already God's Word in which God Himself speaks."³

As for the New Testament writers, Dr. Sanday has this to say:

"Whatever view our Lord Himself entertained as to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the record of His words has certainly come down to us through the medium of persons who shared the current view on the subject.When deductions have been made...there still remains evidence enough that our Lord,

¹B.B.Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, p.19.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

while on earth, did use the language of His contemporaries in regard to the Old Testament." ("Inspiration", pp. 393 ff.)¹

Archdeacon Farrar admitted that Paul "shared, doubtless, in the views of the later Jewish schools - the Tanaim and Amoraim - on the nature of inspiration. These views ... made the words of Scripture coextensive and identical with the words of God," (Life of Paul, I.p.49.)² Otto Pfleiderer also affirms that Paul "fully shared the assumption of his opponents, the irrefragable authority of the letter as the immediately revealed Word of God," (Paulism, I.p.88.)³ Tholuck shows that the application of the Old Testament made by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "rests on the strictest view of inspiration, since passages where God is not the speaker are cited as words of God or of the Holy Ghost, (i.6,7,8, iv.4,7, vii.21, iii.7, x.15,)" (Old Testament in the New, Bibliotheca Sacra, xi.612.)⁴ In like manner, Richard Rothe declares that "Our authors (the authors of the New Testament) look upon the words of the Old Testament as immediate words of God, and adduce them expressly as such, even those of them which are not at all related as direct sayings of God. They see nothing

¹B.B.Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, pp.61-63.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

at all in the sacred volume which is simply the word of its human author and not at the same time the very Word of God Himself," (Zur Dogmatik, pp.177 ff.)¹

One must come to one of two conclusions with regard to Calvin's doctrine of Scripture, either he learned his doctrine from the Scripture authors themselves, or he came to his study of Scripture with a presupposition of its divine origin. However, either conclusion we come to will confirm our belief that Calvin's doctrine was practically identical with that taught in Scripture. To believe that he learned his doctrine directly from Scripture will naturally lead us to that conclusion, and to believe that he came to his study of Scripture with a presupposition concerning it will lead us to inquire as to the origin of this presupposition. It is well known that a strict view of inspiration was the current view of his day. The Roman Church, and those revolting from it, held this common view. It is impossible to find in Church History a time when this view was not the prevailing one. Of course there were numbers of individuals who, from time to time, set forth their private opinions, but these were never given a widespread hearing. It appears that even Calvin's presupposition, if he had such, rests upon a view of inspiration which was traceable to the Apostles themselves or the generation which was

¹B.B.Warfield:Revelation and Inspiration, pp.175-177.

influenced immediately by them. There is no possible way of disassociating the traditional view of Scripture from the one most evident on the pages of Scripture itself.

And even should it be proved to the entire satisfaction of all that the Scripture authors were willing to recognize a human element in Scripture, the fact still remains that Calvin believed with all the earnestness of his soul that God's Word taught the strict view of inspiration which he championed so valiantly. And so, we may say that he was scriptural in two senses of that word, viz., he was subservient to Scripture in every particular of his life and teaching, and he held to and taught the doctrine of Scripture which either is set forth in Scripture itself or he believed to be set forth there. Though Calvin wrote scores of volumes himself, may it be repeated, he was a man of one Book.

Chapter XI

CALVIN'S SCRIPTURAL EXPOSITIONS

Calvin's literary productions fill many volumes. In fact, the products of his pen make an impressive showing amidst the religious literature of the ages. He began to write at an early age and continued tirelessly throughout his very eventful life. His works have broadened his influence tremendously and may be found in the libraries of religious people all over the world. Much of his work has been translated into English and other languages and it would be difficult to find a spot in Christendom upon which the impress of his teachings could not be discovered.

His writings took many forms. There are his "Institutes of the Christian Religion", his Commentaries on most of the books of Scripture, his published sermons, letters, tracts, and various other papers. However, of one thing we may always be sure, viz., it mattered not what form his writings took, they were sure to be scriptural.

Calvin was ably qualified for being an expositor of Scripture. He had been a close student from earliest

years. He had studied the languages in which the Scriptures were written and, while not an outstanding authority in this field, he had them well in hand and drew upon this knowledge continually. He had come in contact with some of the outstanding men of his day during his career as a student and these associations left a rich deposit in his own life. His ability as a student was noticeable to such a large degree that while in Paris, he was asked to write the University sermon by the preacher of the occasion, though it is not known whether or not he actually wrote it.

He entered upon the study of law early in his career and planned to practice it as a profession. Little did he know that he was laying up a valuable experience for the time when he would find it necessary to command keen judgment in determining whether or not a scriptural document was genuine. It is very possible that this phase of work gave his subsequent activities a legalistic leaning, but the good he obtained from it far out-weighed the evil. It at least made him strive toward exactness of interpretation and expression. As the whole weight of the law might rest on one word, so it was possible for the meaning of an

entire passage of Scripture to rest upon one word. This study of law trained his eye to notice everything; nothing escaped his attention.

No one can doubt the fact that he was well read. His references to classical authors, both sacred and secular, are numerous. In his Commentary on the book of Daniel alone, he refers to the writings of thirteen sacred and ten secular authors. The sacred authors are : Augustine, Jerome, Origen, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Luther, Hippolytus, Nicolaus de Lyra, Appollinaris, Oecolampodius, Eusebius, Melanchthon, and Concilia. The secular authors are: Cicero, Homer, Virgil, Juvenal, Herodotus, Xenophon, Ovid, Terence, Polybius, and Plutarch. In his Commentary on Seneca's "Treatise on Clemency", a work of one hundred and fifty-six pages in quarto, he cites fifty-six Latin and twenty-two Greek classical writers, and seven Fathers of the Church.¹ He was the heir of the best that ancient literature had to offer.

This brings us to his first literary endeavor—his Commentary on Seneca's work. In this he already shows us that he has an inclination toward exposition.

¹David Cuthbertson: "A Tragedy of the Reformation," p.21.

This was written before he had exhibited any leaning whatever toward the Church. He did this work well and gave evidence of his ability to appreciate the mind of the author, and so interpret his thought to his readers.

And now, centering our attention upon his scriptural expositions, we may consider his characteristics as an exegete. Let it be noticed, in the first place, that he saw the Bible as a whole. His was not a system of doctrine based upon isolated texts. As he wrote upon any one passage, he had the whole of Scripture in mind. The Bible was not a library of sixty-six books, as H. G. Wells has recently declared, but one Book. This was true because it had one Author. God used different men but He did not allow them to contribute to the message. It was also a Book of one purpose- the revealing of God's person and will to, and redemption of, the race. Everything in it centered around Jesus Christ, the Saviour of men. He interpreted Scripture with Scripture and never failed to see the harmony of the whole. If one detected a discrepancy, it was only a seeming discrepancy. It was due to our lack of knowledge, and therefore it was not the Bible's fault but ours. When all things would be revealed, we would

then see everything in its proper proportion, and apparent contradiction would fade into perfect agreement. It was the Christians place to be humble in these matters, "believing where we cannot prove." Any weak person could lose his faith over a scriptural difficulty, but it required one who was "strong in the Lord" to use this difficulty as a stepping-stone to a greater and more childlike trust.

Calvin also let Scripture speak for itself. He did not try to put words into the mouth of the Author, nor pervert the words which the Author had spoken. No one has yet proved that Calvin approached Scripture in an effort to find proof for his preconceived ideas. Many have brought this charge against him but a close study of his works does not bear this out. He impresses his reader as one, who with open Bible before him, endeavors to explain its doctrines with all fairness to that which is written. As the translator of some of his Commentaries has said:

"No writer ever dealt more fairly and honestly by the Word of God. He is scrupulously careful to let it speak for itself, and to guard against every tendency of his own mind to put upon it a questionable meaning for the sake of establishing some doctrine which he

feels to be important, or some theory which he is anxious to uphold. This is one of his prime excellences. He will not maintain any doctrine, however orthodox and essential, by a text of Scripture which to him appears of doubtful application, or of inadequate force. For instance, firmly as he believed the doctrine of the Trinity, he refuses to derive an argument in its favor, from the plural form of the name of God in the first chapter of Genesis. It were easy to multiply examples of this kind, which, whether we agree in his conclusions or not, cannot fail to produce the conviction, that he is, at least, an honest commentator, and will not make any passage of Scripture speak more or less than, according to his view, its divine Author intended it to speak."¹

He had too small an opinion of man's ability to produce truth to put forth any idea even of his own. God had taken cognizance of man's needs and, in His infinite goodness, had supplied them in Scripture. To hinder the free expression of Scripture was to interfere with the highest welfare of mankind. If the pathway of life was rugged and dangerous, as it surely was, men needed something more than the advice and warnings of their fellow-beings- they needed the help of an all-wise God. Calvin knew this and put forth every effort, not to color Scripture, but to convey it in all its purity to

¹Rev. John King, M.A.: "Preface to Commentary on Genesis."

the people. His mind as well as his heart must be used in this enterprise; his knowledge of grammar as well as the abiding assurance of the illuminating presence of the Holy Spirit:

"In this, as in his other Commentaries, his first and great object is to ascertain the mind of the Holy Spirit. To ascertain this, he proceeds on the principle laid down by Melancthon, 'That Scripture cannot be understood theologically, unless it is first understood grammatically.'¹

Another characteristic of Calvin as an exegete was his decided aversion to the allegorical method of interpretation. He was thoroughly convinced that each passage of Scripture meant something definite and not any of three or four things. As soon as one resorted to the use of the allegorical method he opened the door for any number of varied and doubtful interpretations. It must be remembered that one of the dominant purposes of Calvin's life was to unify Protestantism. We have seen that the Papists furnished their adherents with official interpretations and there was no room for divergence of opinion. When many of these turned to the Protestant faith, they soon began to feel insecure and uncertain since there was no

¹Rev. Jas. Anderson: "Introductory Notice to Commentary on Psalms."

definite standard by which to test and hold fast their faith. To leave the Scriptures free to any and every interpretation, was to pave the way for a division in the Protestant ranks. The people had the right and sane way of ascertaining its meaning. As for those who persisted in allegorizing, he referred to them as:

"....these Allegory-makers....who make the Holy Scripture a nose of wax, by transforming it from the natural sense."¹

He had no objection to recognizing the allegory when it was plainly present in Scripture, but he vigorously objected to the practice of manufacturing them. He was perfectly willing for allegories to be drawn "out of a natural meaning, as we see that St. Paul doth in the Epistle to the Galatians and in other places."²

Scripture was too sacred a thing to subject it to one's imagination or fancy. Calvin considered it a matter of honor not to twist it and turn it to satisfy every whim of his mind. Since Scripture partook of the nature of God, being His Word, it was to be handled in all seriousness:

"I abstain from all those allegories which to some appear plausible; because, as I said at the beginning of the chapter, I do not choose to sport with such great mysteries of God."³

¹Sermon on Job xl.20-28.

²Ibid.

³Commentary on Genesis xlix.12.

To suggest any other meaning than the natural one was a form of gross irreverence. It was a sin against God and against the reader. It was bad enough to go wrong yourself, without leading others astray.

There was really no limit to this evil practice. When one started off with this method there was no telling where he would end. Calvin desired a firmer basis than that for his expositions. He determined to proceed upon a principle that would merit the confidence of his readers and the approval of God. Speaking of a passage in Zechariah which some have thought to be an allegory, Calvin writes:

"Allegories, I know, delight many; but we ought reverently and soberly to interpret the prophetic writings, and not to fly in the clouds, but ever to fix our foot on solid ground."¹

If he had desired a precedent among the Fathers for the use of allegories it would not have been wanting. The writings of the Fathers, even the best of them, are full of them. Some of them vied with one another in seeing how many meanings they could get out of one single passage. Passages of Scripture came to mean so much that they actually meant nothing. Calvin revolted against this tendency among those

¹Commentary on Minor Prophets, Vol.V, p.140.

whom he highly honored, and said of Origen's use of Allegories, that he:

"....corrupts the whole Scripture; and others, too eagerly emulating his example, have extracted smoke out of light. And not only has the simplicity of Scripture been vitiated, but the faith has been almost subverted, and the door open to many foolish dotings."¹

It was entirely possible that this practice contributed to the condition in the Roman Church which precipitated the Reformation. Certainly it was this lack of respect for Scripture that invited tradition to share its place of honor.

The fact which was briefly mentioned in the opening paragraph of this chapter, viz., the extent to which Calvin was scriptural in his expositions, must now be considered more fully. It is possible to open any of Calvin's works at almost any page and find it bristling with Scripture references. In the letter of dedication to Francis in the first volume of the "Institutes", (a letter covering only twenty-one pages,) Calvin refers to forty-nine different passages of Scripture. Three of the first chapters of the Institutes bear the following titles:

¹Commentary on Minor Prophets, Vol. III, p. 89.

"In order to draw near to God the Creator we have need of the Holy Scriptures for our guide and teacher."

"Human reason furnishes proofs which are quite strong enough to remove all doubts concerning the truth of the Scriptures."

"The authority of the Scriptures must be sanctioned by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, in order that we may fully believe it; and it is an impious fiction to say that this authority is derived from the judgment of the Church."

One agrees with Guizot, that "In this circle the mind of Calvin moves. His book is only the development and commentary of the great Christian truths, facts, dogmas, and precepts with which the Holy Scriptures furnish him."¹ We have no reason to doubt Calvin's own words when he said:

"I have hitherto stated only what is plainly and unambiguously taught in Scripture."²

His books are the sort desired by those who wish companion volumes to the Bible, rather than volumes which supplant or oppose it. They are to be read along with the Scriptures as an aid to a better understanding and appreciation of them. There is no disagreement with Scripture; all are in perfect harmony with it:

¹"St. Louis and Calvin," p. 180.

²Institutes I.xviii.3.

"The argument at every point, (in the Institutes,) even in the first book, 'De Recognitione Dei Creatoris,' takes up scriptural phrase, and drapes itself in it as a sure vesture fitted to it closely, and with great skill. This prominence of biblical statement, worked into every phase of his dogmatic scheme, and disguising its mere abstract propositions, constituted and constitutes to this day with many minds, the greatest success of Calvin's work. The philosopher seems hidden in the divine, the dogmatist in the scripturist."¹

Nor should we forget his singular gifts for systematic thought. In Calvin's hands, all things found order and perfect arrangement. His mind worked in this fashion and naturally the themes with which he dealt were handled in this manner:

"He sought not mainly to arrange the facts of Scripture, but rather to systematize its doctrines, and to bring out the mind of the Spirit of God in the revelation of His just, and good, and holy Law in a complete and harmonious form."²

This was a service for which Protestants can never be thankful enough. Nothing of this sort had been attempted by Luther or any of the other leaders in the Reformation. This service of Calvin added much to their strength and went a long way towards crystallizing the thought of the Protestant forces.

¹Tulloch: "Leaders of the Reformation- Calvin," p.161.

²Translator's Preface to Commentary on Harmony of Pentateuch, Vol.1.

His style, too, was extremely clear and vivacious. Laymen were able to read and enjoy what he had written. This was evidently his great desire, since his purpose in writing these volumes was to clarify rather than to obscure the meaning of Scripture. Without doubt he had the masses in mind as he wrote. They were the ones who were suffering from the lack of spiritual truth. He meant to emancipate them if it lay in his power to do so. Too long had they been as sheep without a shepherd, unlearned folk without a teacher. His democratic spirit went out to them and his work is a monument to this fact:

"If God has endued me with any aptness for the interpretation of Scripture, I am fully persuaded that I have faithfully and carefully endeavored to exclude from it all barren refinements, however plausible and fitted to please the ear, and to preserve genuine simplicity, adapted solidly to edify the children of God, who, being not content with the shell, wish to penetrate to the kernel."¹

He never allowed his high regard for Scripture to induce him to believe that its true meaning lay in some deep philosophical interpretation. God has seen to it that it should not baffle the minds of those for whom it was written. The great mistake of so many was that

¹Commentary on Minor Prophets, Vol.I, pp.xviii,xix.

in seeking a mysterious doctrine, they passed right over the obvious doctrine which the Lord meant for them to receive:

"Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely. Let us not only neglect as doubtful, but boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions, which lead us away from the natural meaning."¹

A sound ethical note in his expositions is also characteristic of Calvin. As had been said, he was vitally interested in making religion a matter of life as well as doctrine. He never was guilty of divorcing the two. He thundered forth against the sins of his day in a manner akin to the preaching of the prophets in the Old Testament. Of course he was anxious for the people to have a living faith in God and His truth, but he was just as anxious for righteousness to roll down as a mighty stream.

Calvin's Commentaries fill forty-five volumes. He wrote on every book in the Bible except Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Esther, Nehemiah, Ezra, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Revelation. Regarding the last named book, he once said that he was altogether

¹Commentary on Galatians, p. 136.

unable to understand the meaning of the very obscure writer of that book. It is very evident that he took up the books of Scripture according to his idea of their importance for the time in which he was living. It is recognized that he is best on the Psalms and the Pauline Epistles. He appears to have a great fondness for David and Paul and, feeling that he had much in common with them, he was better able to interpret their minds to their readers.

Dean Farrar calls Calvin the "greatest exegete and theologian of the Reformation...His Commentaries, almost alone among those of his epoch, are still a living force."¹ He further says that he is "one of the greatest interpreters of Scripture who ever lived," and says that this was true because of Calvin's vigorous intellect, dauntless spirit, thorough knowledge of human nature, his rich and strange spiritual experience, and his growing sense of the grandeur of the divine.²

Dr. H. R. Mackintosh, in a class lecture in New College, Edinburgh, declared that "In his Institutes, Calvin has made history." Nearly all theology can now be divided into two classes: Calvinistic or anti-Calvinistic. Reuss has pronounced Calvin "beyond all question the greatest

¹F. W. Farrar, D.D.: History of Interpretation, pp.242,243.

²Ibid.

exegete of his century."¹ Schaff is convinced that "His judgment is of the greatest weight, for he had no superior, and scarcely an equal for thorough and systematic Bible knowledge and exegetical insight."² Arminius himself had said that Calvin "is incomparable in the interpretation of Scripture."³ He used Calvin's Commentaries freely and was greatly indebted to him for this great service. It may be safely said that the whole approach to Scripture was altered by the publication of his works.⁴

When we say that Calvin holds a superior position among the commentators of the period of the Reformation, we must not forget that there were many. Among them may be mentioned Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Musculus, Pellicanus, Chytraeus, Brenz, Bugenhagen, Bullinger, Beza, Nucer, Mercer, Camerarius and Manymos. It is true that Calvin had no peer among them.

¹Presbyterian and Reformed Review, Jan.1893, article by Dunlop Moore on Calvin's Doctrine of Holy Scripture.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴"Les Commentaires de Calvin marquent une révolution dans l'étude de la Bible, et occupent, à ce titre, une place éminente, non-seulement dans l'histoire de la théologie, mais dans celle de L'esprit humain. C'est le bon sens détrônant l'érudition scholastique; c'est la vérité cherchée, sur chaque verset, sur chaque mot, par le plus droit et le plus court chemin." Félix Bünigener: Calvin, p. 418.

PART II

HOW CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE AFFECTED
HIS OTHER DOCTRINES

Chapter XII

GOD AND PROVIDENCE

At this point in our study of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture, we shall see to what extent this doctrine affected his other doctrines. Four or five of these will be examined, not because they are the only ones affected, but because they are basic, and representative of all the others. A work of this kind forbids the lengthy treatment which an examination of all his doctrines would require.

It may be said at the very outset that Calvin's whole doctrinal system is based upon Scripture. He would have been the first men in the world to relinquish a doctrine could it have been proved to him that the doctrine under discussion lacked scriptural indorsement. It was the rule of his life to speak only when Scripture had spoken first:

"This opinion (that there were two seraphim) I willingly adopt, though I do not venture to make any assertion where Scripture is silent."¹

Every tenet had to stand this test.

In approaching his doctrine of God, we are reminded that there are some who contend that Calvin's view of Scripture resulted from his preconceived idea of God. This

¹Commentary on Isaiah vi.2.

assertion seems hardly reasonable when we remember that Calvin's first published words on the subject of religion distinctly declare that God is only adequately known through the revelation made in Scripture. He admits that God has shed abroad evidences of His glorious Presence in nature, but early in the history of mankind, men's eyes had become blinded through sin and a fuller and more complete revelation was found to be necessary. It was then that He selected certain men to receive the words which He would dictate, that they might set them down in writing, that the whole world might have access to them.

It must be remembered too that we have no statements from Calvin concerning his idea of God until after he has become a thorough-going student of Holy Scripture. His entire doctrine presents itself as a strictly logical conclusion based upon his interpretation of the evidence presented in Scripture.

Calvin never employs mere reason in setting forth his idea of God. He never pretends to say what God should be like. He is never guilty of saying that the God he worships must be so and so. He considered it out of his province to set up a God of his own mental creation. On the contrary, he considered it obligatory to accept and do homage to the God who had revealed Himself in Scripture.

The attributes of God which appeared to conflict constituted no great problem for Calvin. He attributed this apparent contradiction of qualities to God's greatness and our littleness. Was He not infinite while we were finite? It would have been more of a puzzle to Calvin had God's nature been easily understandable. The very confusion which certain passages of Scripture created was an unanswerable argument for the belief that God was incomprehensible:

"As the majesty of God is infinite, if we will comprehend it, it doth rather swallow up our senses; if we endeavor to ascend unto it, we vanish away."¹

Man's knowledge of God was necessarily fragmentary. It was unreasonable to expect mortal man to grasp the full meaning of the Eternal God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. In lowly terms He had taught us something of Himself in Scripture but we were not supposed to draw final conclusions from these. God was not like an idol of wood or stone which the physical eye could take in at a glance; He had to describe Himself in other than physical terms:

"God hath given Himself this title (the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) that He might distinguish Himself from idols;

¹Commentary on Acts vii.32.

for we do not comprehend God in His essence, which cannot be seen and which is infinite."¹

And then, Calvin's abiding conviction that the Scriptures were consistent assured him that God was the same God from Genesis to Revelation, and that His attributes did not conflict with each other even though they seemed to do so. The slaying of the first-born in Egypt was merely a demonstration of His divine justice; the feeding of the five thousand, a witness to His compassion and mercy as shown forth in His Son. It was as necessary for Him to rid the early Church of such members as Ananias and Sapphira, as it was for Him to add to them such members as Saul of Tarsus and Cornelius. Had not the Holy Spirit by the mouth of Isaiah declared: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways...For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts"? (Isa.lv.8,9.)

Calvin's ideas of the majesty and holiness of God are also based on his belief in the self-revelation of God in Scripture. Moses had been commanded to remove his sandals in the presence of God at the burning bush. When

¹Commentary on Acts iii.13.

He had spoken to him at Mt. Sanai, He had commanded him to "Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish," (Ex. xix.21.). It had also been said that "the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel," (Ex. xxiv.17.). Isaiah had had a vision of the Lord, "high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." The glory of the Lord had filled the temple built by Solomon, on the day of its dedication. The Holy Spirit of God had come in mighty power upon the apostles waiting in the upper room, and had sent them out as flaming evangelists with the message of salvation. The awfulness of God which was pictured in Scripture impressed Calvin mightily, and this impression continually revealed itself in his writings about God.

Calvin's idea of God as Creator was also shaped by his doctrine of Scripture to a marked degree. The Genesis account of God's creative work was not a primitive conception of how the world began, but was God's own explanation to his creatures of how He formed them and the physical universe in which they lived. Avoiding all allegorical interpretations, as was his rule, he took the words in Genesis literally, and formed from it

his conception of God the Creator:

"Scripture, indeed, makes known to us
the time and manner of creation."¹

Calvin never encountered any difficulty regarding the shortness of time in which God created the world and man. On the other hand, he felt constrained to give an explanation as to why God took six days to do it. The divine power of the Almighty might have brought forth the universe in the twinkling of an eye, but for some reason the creative activity extended over six days. Calvin believed that God took six days for this work in order that men might see more clearly each stage of this majestic pageant of creation and meditate upon it. Instead of marvelling at the whole, men might marvel at each new creation and glorify the One whose power was so graphically demonstrated:

"So He created the world in six days,
(Gen.i,) not because He had any need
of space of time but that He might
the better stay us in the meditating
upon His works, (Ex.xx.11.)"²

This explanation of the length of creation is given in dealing with a somewhat parallel case - the account of Peter's escape from prison as recounted in Acts xii. Calvin says that Peter was not delivered from prison in one sweeping act,

¹Commentary on Psalm xix.1.

²Commentary on Acts xii.10.

but by several deliverances, that the Church which was praying for his release might have more whereof to glorify God.

If Scripture had been simply man's out-reach for God, then Calvin would have felt justified in formulating his own idea of the God he believed to be present in the world. But, according to his view, the Scriptures did not result from man's out-reach, but God's unveiling. Therefore there was no alternative. The only way which lay open to him was that of full acceptance of the God thus revealed, realizing that now we only see in part, but later we shall know even as we are known. Scripture, since it was authoritative, partaking of the nature of God Himself, must be received, and having received it, he built his doctrine of God upon it.

In like manner, Calvin's doctrine of Providence was a result of his study of Scripture. God's own Word depicted the manner in which God's children should consider passing events. In the Old Testament, every happening, large or small, was accounted an act of God. God had not created the world and then forsaken it. He was sustaining it and controlling it every moment of the day. His providence was merely the outworking of His plans and purposes for mankind. Nothing came by chance - all occurrences were the results

of God's purposive activity. The forces of nature, such as thunder and lightning, rain and hail, earthquake and drought, all were used of God to meet certain situations. When the storm raged about the ship in which Jonah was traveling, the members of the crew felt sure that God was dealing with them for some special reason. According to the story, they were right, for when Jonah had been thrown overboard the sea became calm again. When the earth opened and swallowed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, their families and possessions, it was, in the eyes of all present, a just punishment from God for their rebellion against Moses. God sent the rain which caused the flood, etc. Calvin accepted this point of view fully and saw God's hand in all events.

Therefore, there were no miracles for him. The sun standing still was no more miraculous than its daily appearance on the eastern horizon. Either incident was merely the outworking of God's plans. Nature was not a closed system by any means. God had no hesitancy whatever in stepping into the usual order of things and bringing about an unexpected occurrence. Calvin really considered that the goodness and mercy of God required that He employ special means of protecting His people on special occasions of impending danger:

"Luke commendeth unto us the providence
of God in preserving His children; and

though it is hidden from the wicked,
yet we may behold the same with the
eyes of faith."¹

The parting of the waters of the Red Sea was simply an expression of God's fatherly care and watchfulness over His children. All things worked together for good to them that loved the Lord. Concerning the earthquake which occurred during the imprisonment of Paul and Silas at Philippi, Calvin declares:

"The Lord, in showing this visible sign, meant chiefly to provide for His servants, that they might more manifestly know that their prayers were heard; yet He had respect also of the rest. He could have loosed the fetters of Paul and Silas without an earthquake, and also have opened the gates. But that addition served not a little to confirm them, seeing that the Lord, for their sakes, did shake both the air and also the earth."²

Calvin also believed that Satan was held in check by God and that he acted only at God's permission:

"But the question is, why God doth grant Satan so great liberty, as to suffer him to deceive miserable men, and to bewitch them with true divinations...I answer that Satan hath never so much liberty granted him of God, save only that the unthankful world may be punished."³

Had not God put bounds to Satan's activity with regard to

¹Commentary on Hebrews iv.21.

²Commentary on Acts xvi.26.

³Ibid. xvi.16.

his treatment of Job? Calvin received the book of Job as authentic history, verbally inspired by God, and therefore profitable for a doctrinal basis. Calvin could see in the opposition and persecution which faced the early Church only the activity of Satan. Referring to the occasion of Peter's arraignment before the Sanhedrin, he says:

"Let us learn here, by the way, that we must so consider the providence of God, that we know that it is the chief and only guider of all things which are done in the world, that the devil and all the wicked are kept back by God's bridle."¹

God's providential acts also included punishment for sin. This was necessary for the highest welfare of all, and especially for the person who had sinned. In some cases where the life of the sinning one had been taken, the punishment was calculated to act as a warning to all those remaining:

"That punishment wherewith the Lord punished Sapphira containeth no new thing, save only that the example was more confirmed thereby. And it came to pass by the certain providence of God, that the Church should see apart the obstinate wickedness and treacherous mind of them both."²

Calvin's view of Scripture brought him into many difficult situations when he came to consider some of the

¹Commentary on Acts xvi.16.

²Ibid.

providential acts of God. For instance, the Scripture plainly declared that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and Scripture could not err. The result of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart caused untold suffering among the people of the land of Egypt. Calvin explained the whole matter on the basis of intention. God had a righteous purpose in view when He hardened Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh was actuated by evil intent only, when he refused to let the children of Israel go. Therefore, we have here an act for which God and Pharaoh are both responsible. For God, it was righteousness; for Pharaoh, it was sin. God was always able to turn the evil acts of men to his own advantage;

"Notwithstanding herein is contained a singular doctrine, that God doth so govern and guide all things by His secret counsel, that He doth bring to pass those things which He hath determined, even by the wicked. Not that they are ready willingly to do Him such service, but because He turneth their counsels and attempts backward; so that on the one side appeareth great equity and most great righteousness; on the other appeareth nought but wickedness and iniquity."¹

He interprets in the same way the incident in Israel's history where the people desired a king contrary to God's wishes, and commenting upon it in his Commentary on the Acts, he says:

¹Commentary on Acts iv.28.

"And assuredly the people dealt wickedly;
but God who knoweth how to use evil
things well, turned that offence into
safety."¹

Calvin gives a similar explanation of Paul's escape from the band of Jews in Jerusalem who had pledged themselves neither to eat nor drink "till they had killed Paul". Calvin says that the chief captain protected Paul from the mob simply that he might prevent a public uproar, "whereof he should have given an account before the governor." Yet, little did he know that he was executing the counsel of God in delivering Paul. Calvin is convinced that we should understand "that God doth guide the heart of a profane man by a secret instinct."²

Calvin also considered the practice of casting lots a profitable one, basing his belief upon the authority of Scripture. Quoting Proverbs xvi.33, ("The lots are cast into the bosom, and the judgment of them cometh forth from the Lord,") he says:

"Those men who think it to be wickedness
to cast lots at all, offend partly
through ignorance, and partly they un-
derstand not the force of the word....
This ordinance or custom is no more
corrupt and depraved by corruption,
than the corrupt vanity of the Chal-
deans doth corrupt true and natural
astrology."³

¹Commentary on Acts xiii.21.

²Ibid. xxiii.19.

³Ibid. i.26.

In this case, Calvin was discussing the incident in the early Church when it became necessary to select an apostle to take the place of Judas Iscariot. Barnabas and Matthias had both been mentioned, so the apostles cast lots and the choice fell upon Matthias. Calvin is constrained to believe that, humanly speaking, Barnabas seemed the better man of the two. However, since the choice fell upon Matthias, Calvin considered this to be a sure sign that God was wiser than men, and that this was His choice. To refuse to see God's hand in such an event as this was to refuse to acknowledge God's guidance and interest in the affairs of His children. Such a practice was nothing short of ingratitude. Of course God used agents to carry out His will, but we must not allow the agents to attract our attention away from the actual source of the event.

All through this doctrine of Providence, one detects the elements of it which are necessitated by the view of Scripture which Calvin held. He is hard-pressed for an explanation of several points, but he does not hesitate to give some answer which, to him, at least, seems adequate. What he teaches concerning the onward movement of God's purposive acts must harmonize with the teaching set forth in God's authoritative Word. His doctrine is really an exposition of the ideas of Providence which he believes he has discovered in Scripture.

Chapter XIII

PREDESTINATION

Perhaps in no other doctrine does Calvin depend so completely upon Scripture as he does in his doctrine of Predestination. He freely admits that the doctrine is awe-inspiring, full of mystery, and one easily detects a reluctance on his part to put much emphasis upon it, were it not for the fact that Scripture plainly teaches it. We have seen how he considered himself under an obligation to teach whatever was delivered in Scripture. This had been his belief with regard to all scriptural doctrines. Since Scripture excluded all extraneous matters, it followed that it included only those truths which God meant for us to receive and appropriate. He repeats that conviction in dealing with the subject of predestination:

"Whatever, therefore, is declared in Scripture concerning predestination, we must be cautious not to withhold from believers, lest we appear either to defraud them of the favor of their God, or to reprove and censure the Holy Spirit for publishing what it would be useful by any means to suppress."¹

He seems to imply that he is not quite so anxious to convey this truth to reprobates since it can be nothing but bad news for them. He is, however, most anxious that the elect

¹Institutes III.xxi.3.

shall receive this doctrine fully since it will add much to their peace of mind, and will no doubt give them added courage and patience to run the race that is set before them, especially when the race-course is difficult and dangerous.

But it seemed that even some of the godly hesitated to delve into such a mysterious doctrine. Perhaps the joy it brought them was lessened to a large extent by the fear that some of those most precious to them would be numbered among those whom God had delegated to perdition. Calvin's writings show that he had been faced with such a hesitancy on the part of many, and that he had sought to banish the fear by suggesting to them a boundary inside of which they could move with safety. This boundary was, of course, Holy Scripture:

"Must they (the godly) avoid every thought of predestination? By no means: for as the Holy Spirit has taught nothing but what it behooves us to know, the knowledge of this would no doubt be useful, provided it is confined to the word of God. Let this then be our sacred rule, to seek to know nothing concerning it, except what Scripture teaches us: when the Lord closes His holy mouth, let us also stop the way, that we may not go farther."¹

There is hardly any doubt that Calvin would have rejected such a suggestion as predestination had he not discovered it in Scripture. But discovering it there, he

¹Commentary on Romans ix.14.

put his whole soul into the task of making a worthy exposition of it. Once into the subject, he never falters. He follows it through, hesitating at none of its implications, and making no effort to soften any of its uncomfortable aspects. He declares that it is not a matter to be conjectured about; no human reason can unravel such a mystery; no conclusions must be reached until Scripture has been thoroughly explored and every bit of information concerning the doctrine brought to light. It is a matter of too great importance to be decided upon with insufficient evidence:

"But I advise my readers to adopt no prejudice on either side, till it shall appear from adduced passages of Scripture what sentiments ought to be entertained. In conformity, therefore, to the clear doctrine of the Scriptures, we assert, that by an eternal and immutable counsel, God has once for all determined, both whom He would admit to salvation, and whom He would condemn to destruction."¹

Calvin is here following his usual course - appealing to the authority of Scripture. All controversies end at this point, as far as he is concerned. In all his discourses on the subject, where he is replying to the opponents of the doctrine, he takes refuge in this appeal:

"We shall do no good by proceeding any further....the Lord needs no other defence than what He has employed by His

¹Institutes III.xxi.7.

Spirit speaking by the mouth of Paul;
and we forget to speak well when we
cease to speak with God."¹

And on another occasion:

"But let us dismiss these controversies;
they are unnecessary for those who think
they have wisdom enough in the word of
God."²

One of the chief objections to the doctrine has always been its inconsistency with the idea of the freedom of the will. Any extreme interpretation of predestination will naturally relegate free will to the realm of impossibility. Calvin is perfectly willing to admit this and really sees in it a marked advantage. He is quite sure that anything God does for a man is better than anything he can do for himself. It is a source of comfort to Calvin to know that his ways are ordered of the Lord. He is sure that "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." All through the Scripture he sees instances of God's overruling providence, in matters both large and small, and he is satisfied that God is a great deal more interested in man's eternal destiny than He is in the everyday affairs of man's life. This is, in fact, the distinction which Calvin draws between Providence and Predestination. Providence concerns us here and now; Predestination has to do with the eternal issues of life. It

¹Institutes III.xxiii.5.

²Ibid. III.xxii.9.

is cause for great thanksgiving when we come to realize that God turns many into the way everlasting, who, if left to their own free will, would certainly be lost. Calvin cites Paul as a glowing example of God's intervention for the sake of a man's salvation:

"In craving epistles of the high priest, he ran headlong against Christ willingly; and now he is enforced to obey whether he will or no. This is surely the most excellent mercy of God, in that that man is reclaimed unto salvation contrary to the purpose of his mind, whom so great a heat carried headlong into destruction."¹

Therefore, faith is a gift of God. It is not a thing which men may freely accept or reject, else men would be justified in claiming a certain amount of merit for choosing it. Hence, it follows that men are given faith because they are elected of God, not elected because they have faith. To substantiate this belief, Calvin refers to John iii.36, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," etc. With regard to this verse he declares:

"For He doth not begin to choose us after that we believe, but He sealeth His adoption, which was hidden in our hearts, by the gift of faith, that it may be manifest and sure."²

This whole line of thought is based, of course, on Calvin's firm belief in total depravity. If man, in himself, is

¹Commentary on Acts ix.3.

²Ibid. xiii.48.

unable to do anything good, then it is certain that he would never aspire to faith toward God. If he ever received it at all, it would have to come as a gift from God.

In the course of Calvin's discussion of predestination, he shows that God chooses nations, as well as individuals. Had not he chosen the Hebrews from among all people to be his peculiar possession? Calvin cites Deut. xxx.8,9; iv.37; vii.7,8; x.14,15.¹ It is very clear from Scripture that He did not choose them because of any merit of their own. In fact, He had called them a stiff-necked and rebellious people. Only His love and mercy can account for it.

Scripture also shows that God chose a special tribe from among the chosen people: "Moreover He refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim; but chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which He loved," (Psalm lxxviii.67,68).²

And so it is not surprising that He selects individuals for salvation. Calvin finds evidences for this in all the Scripture:

"So the same apostle, (Peter,) by calling believers, to whom he writes, 'elect according to the foreknowledge of God,' (I Peter 1.2,) properly expresses that secret predestination by which God has

¹Institutes III.xxi.5.

²Ibid. III.xxi.6.

marked out whom He would as His children....In another place also....Paul declares, 'The Lord knoweth them that are His,' (II Tim.ii.19)."¹

Calvin was ready to stand with Peter and Paul, and any others of the human agents God had used in the production of Scripture, in this matter of election to salvation, because he firmly believed that they were merely speaking the words which God had dictated to them. To him, it was not simply an idea set forth by prophets and apostles, nor yet an article of faith of the Church from earliest days: it was a part of the truth which God had delivered to His people and which He expected them to receive. But, in case anyone should doubt the words of the apostles and prophets, Calvin was ready to show him that Christ taught predestination:

"Now, let the Master and Judge decide the whole matter....He exclaims, 'All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me. And this is the Father's will, that of all which He hath given me, I should lose nothing,' (John vi.37,39.) Observe, the origin is from the donation of the Father, that we are given into the custody and protection of Christ."²

He further quotes John vi.44,45, and xvii.9. The latter ("I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me; for they are thine,") he says:

¹Commentary on Acts III.xxii.6.

²Institutes III.xxii.7.

"shows that the whole world does not belong to the Creator; only that grace delivers from the curse and wrath of God, and from eternal death, a few, who would otherwise perish, but leaves the world in its destruction, to which it has been destined."¹

Calvin also declares that "Christ claims to Himself the right of election, in common with the Father," and quotes as proof of this: "I speak not of all; I know whom I have chosen," (John xiii.8.).

Calvin is strongly opposed to the idea that God's foreknowledge of a man's good works determines in any way his election. This was the belief of many who sought a reason for God's choosing. They were not satisfied merely with knowing that God predestines, but they wanted to know why He predestines; on what basis the choice is made. Calvin's answer for this question was simply, that God's selection was a gratuitous calling:

"We have the apostle's authority that the salvation of believers is founded solely of the decision of divine election, and that that favor is not procured by works, but proceeds from gratuitous calling."²

He substantiates his conviction by pointing to God's selection of Jacob and rejection of Esau.³ Surely no one would claim that this choice was made on the basis

¹Institutes III.xxii.7.

²Ibid. III.xxii.5.

³Ibid. III.xxii.6.

of merit. Paul had been confronted with this same question and had given the answer: "For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion", (Romans ix.15.) Calvin adds:

"And what is this but a plain declaration of the Lord, that He finds no cause in men to induce Him to show favor to them, but derives it solely from His own mercy; and therefore that the salvation of His people is His work? When God fixes your salvation in Himself alone, why will you descend into yourself?"¹

Calvin believes that "the truth of God on this point is too certain to be shaken, too clear to be overthrown by the authority of men."² He quotes a number of passages from Scripture to give the thought further weight. As far as he is concerned, he is perfectly willing to let the whole matter rest upon God's will. He knows that God's ways are past finding out and that the faithful should rest content in the knowledge that God doeth all things well. If God had wanted us to know his reason for predestination, He would have made it known in His Word. Calvin says that Paul might have settled the whole matter in a word if he had pleaded the consideration of works:

¹Institutes III.xxii.6.

²Ibid. III.xxii.1.

"Why, then, does he not do this?....
Why, but from necessity? for the
Holy Spirit, who spoke by his mouth,
never labored under the malady of
forgetfulness. Without any evasion
or circumlocution, therefore, he
answers, that God favors His elect
because He will, and has mercy be-
cause He will."¹

Thus far we have been dealing particularly with the election side of predestination. The other side of the subject is reprobation. Calvin considers both to be essential to God's nature - election, an expression of His mercy, and reprobation, an expression of His justice. Here again, we have an illustration of Calvin's dependence upon Scripture for his position. The Bible, as he interpreted it, plainly and unmistakably taught reprobation. He was not satisfied with saying that God permitted a man to be lost, but, on the strength of Scripture, he believed that God willed it. At one place in his works he complains that some biblical interpreters

"only allow God a permissive power, and in this way make his counsel dependent on the pleasure of men. But what saith the Spirit? That the hardening (of men's hearts) is from God, who thus precipi-²tates those whom He means to destroy."

Calvin was sure that reprobation redounded to God's glory just as much as did election. He could conceive of a

¹Institutes III.xxii.9.

²Commentary on Joshua xi.20.

universe, only where all things work together in adding glory to God. It was unthinkable that God should have inaugurated a system which would have subtracted from his glory. Of course, reprobation was exceedingly distasteful to many but Calvin had no alternative when he had found reprobation in Scripture. He is confident that these who oppose the doctrine, do it "to avert odium from God" but he considers this to be "puerile and absurd", declaring that:

"the petulance of men is intolerable, if it refuses to be restrained by the word of God, which treats of His incomprehensible counsel, adored by angels themselves."¹

Since Scripture is consistent and equally valuable in all its parts, Calvin does not hesitate to draw his proof texts from any part of the Bible. He declares that:

"The declaration of Solomon ought to be universally admitted, that 'The Lord hath made all things for Himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.'"²

He further cites Matt. xv.13, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." He is at a loss to see how any one can doubt the bearing which this verse has upon reprobation, and feels that if this citation

¹Institutes III.xxiii.1.

²Ibid. III.xxiii.6.

leaves them unconvinced, "there is nothing so clear as to be capable of proof to such persons."¹

Since reprobation was taught in Scripture and was, therefore, God's will, then no man had a right to question it:

"How exceedingly presumptuous it is only to inquire into the causes of the divine will; which is in fact, and is justly entitled to be, the cause of everything that exists.... For the will of God is the highest rule of justice; so that what He wills must be considered just, for this very reason, because He wills it."²

Calvin further rests upon Scripture in his argument that, even though the reprobate show some tendency toward a desire for salvation, it is only because of fear and not of repentance. He refers to the uneasiness which came upon Felix as he listened to the message of Paul.³ Being totally depraved and predestined to perdition, it was unreasonable to believe that he had any sincere desire for life as it is found in Christ.

Calvin also points to Festus, whose actions clearly illustrate the blindness of the reprobate mind. He intimated that Paul was beside himself, mentally unbalanced, when in fact, Festus himself was simply unable to grasp the

¹Institutes III.xxiii.1.

²Ibid. III.xxiii.2.

³Commentary on Acts xxiv.25.

tremendous spiritual truths which the great Apostle was proclaiming.¹ If Festus had been one of the elect, Paul's message would have gone home to his heart, but being reprobate, it fell upon unresponsive ears.

The case of Stephen's death, impresses Calvin with the frenzy into which the truth of the Word brings the reprobate.² The message of Scripture speaks their doom, and not being able to deny it, they fly into a rage and turn loose their fury upon the messenger:

"Yet we are taught by these examples,
that we must not look that the word
of God should draw all men unto a
sound mind."³

Predestination, Calvin admitted, was a great mystery, a "decretum quidem horribile fateor," but it was God's own plan, as was evidenced by its presence in Scripture; therefore, it must be taught and accepted by the faithful.

¹Commentary on Acts xxvi. 24.

²Ibid. vii. 54.

³Ibid.

Chapter XIV

THE CHURCH AND THE SACRAMENTS

Few Christians, if any, have had a higher conception of the Church than John Calvin. To him it was a sacred institution, having been called into being by the Holy Spirit of God. Christ had given His life for it, and it was truly His Bride. However, the Church was not an end in itself, regardless of its exalted position. It was God's divine means for building up His children in the faith, and the perfection of His saints. And if Calvin had been asked the chief function of the Church, he would have replied immediately that it was the ministry of the Word. It was only so far as the Church disseminated the truths of God as found in Scripture that it would fulfill its divinely appointed task. Calvin declares in the beginning of his fourth book of the Institutes that God could have made His people perfect in a moment but chose the maturing process of the Church. He is indebted to Scripture for this conception of the Church,¹ and he is thoroughly convinced that this maturing process is dependent upon the appropriation of God's message as we have it in Scripture.

¹Ephesians iv.10-13.

We have seen in a previous chapter that Calvin's highest conception of a minister was a "Minister of the Word." His pastoral duties were incident to his office, but he had been called of God primarily for the purpose of expounding the Word. God's ministers, from Old Testament days, had been concerned chiefly with this duty. This had been the spiritual food upon which God's Church had been fed from earliest times. God had directed the prophecies to be committed to writing.

"To these likewise were added the histories, which were productions of the prophets, but composed under the dictation of the Holy Spirit....That whole body of Scripture, therefore, consisting of the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms, and the Histories, was the word of God to the ancient Church; and....the priests and teachers"....were "wholly confined within these limits, that they should answer the people from the mouth of God."¹

And the New Testament Church was no exception to this rule. Its one message was the message of Scripture. Calvin quotes I Peter iv.11, in support of this contention, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;"

"Hence we conclude, also, that the apostles were allowed no more discretion than the prophets before them - namely, to expound the ancient Scripture, and to show that the things delivered in it were accomplished in Christ."²

¹Institutes IV.viii.6.

²Ibid. IV.viii.8.

There was, however, a tremendous difference between the apostles and their successors: the former had been "certain and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit," and therefore what they delivered carried with it the authority of God Himself; whereas "succeeding ministers have no other office than to teach what is revealed and recorded in the sacred Scriptures."¹ This left them no right to establish new doctrines or practices. They were obliged to adhere to the doctrine to which God had made all subject, without any exception. This general rule was applicable, not only to individuals, but to the Church as well. This guaranteed freedom in the Church, that is, freedom within the limits of Scripture. No man or group of men had the authority to add to, or take away from, the truth to which the Church was witness.

Calvin gleaned from Scripture the marks by which a true Church should be recognized. In the first place, the true Church was made up of God's elect: "His Church whose foundation is His secret election."² Of course there were many in the Church who were not of it. This led Calvin to distinguish between the visible and invisible Church. Out of the visible host God knew the portion

¹Institutes IV.viii.9.

²Ibid. IV.i.2.

which belonged to Him. Man's eye was unable to separate them but the great Shepherd knew His own sheep:

"It is often impossible to discover any difference between the children of God and the ungodly; between His peculiar flock and wild beasts."¹

Calvin doubted not that he had discovered the doctrine of election in Scripture, and on the basis of that doctrine, none but the elect could possibly make up the Church of God.

Calvin also saw the preservation of the Church as a mark of its favor with God. The Church had passed through many dark days but it had always made its reappearance in the sunlight of God's love and protection. He refers, as an illustration of this, to the occasion when Elijah felt that he was left alone in a world of Baal worshippers. But God was able to assure him that there were yet seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to this heathen idol.² Calvin's belief in Scripture made him a firm believer in the Church, since Scripture was truly a divine record of God's preservation of His Church.

Calvin further characterized the Church as an institution, out of whose folds there was neither remission

¹Institutes IV.1.2.

²Ibid.

of sins nor salvation:

"Out of her bosom there can be no remission of sins, or any salvation, according to the testimony of Joel and Isaiah, (Joel ii.32; Isaiah xxxvii.35;) which is confirmed by Ezekial, (Ezekial xiii.9,) when he denounces that those whom God excludes from the heavenly life, shall not be enrolled among His people."¹

He firmly believed that "a departure from the Church is a renunciation of God and Christ."² All of this, he was confident, he had found in God's Word. He would never have been guilty of such boldness as to assert such an important doctrine simply upon his own reasoning. God's continual guidance of His people Israel and His seeming neglect of other peoples, impressed Calvin with the thought that this might always be so. Quoting Psalm cvi.4,5, ("Remember me, O Lord, with the favor that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thy inheritance,") he says:

"In these words the paternal favor of God, and the peculiar testimony of the spiritual life, are restricted to His flock, to teach us that it is always fatally dangerous to be separated from the Church."³

¹Institutes IV.i.4.

²Ibid.IV.i.10.

³Ibid.IV.i.4.

There are many persons who accuse Calvin of being naturally strict, heartless, and severe. They point to such contentions as the above as unquestionable proof of his narrow disposition. Such criticism is very unfair and shows a lack of understanding of the real Calvin. There are many passages in his works and incidents in his life which reveal to us the kindly, warm-hearted man that he was. He was only as strict, and severe, and narrow as he conceived the Bible to be. What he found there, he accepted, and based all his doctrines upon its authority. If Calvin is at fault, the fault is not to be found in the man himself, it is to be found in his approach to Scripture, and the logical conclusions which he drew from a too literal interpretation of many of its passages. Calvin was particularly anxious to make salvation depend upon a connection with the Church, but he held that view because he conscientiously believed Scripture taught it. And what Scripture had spoken, God had declared.

Calvin believed also that the government of the Church had been fixed by Scripture and could not be changed. The officers which the Church should have and their qualifications, had all been made plain in Holy Writ, Scripture taught him that there should be more democracy in the Church than had formerly been supposed. He seriously objected to the name "hierarchy", saying that it was:

"a name, in my opinion, improper, and certainly not used in the Scripture. For it was the design of the Holy Spirit, in everything related to the government of the Church, to guard against any dream of principality or dominion."¹

It is easy to see in what direction he was striking here. To him, the Papacy had little semblance to a real Christian Church. All of its errors he traced to a neglect of Scripture:

"For the Lord acknowledges no place as His temple, where His word is not heard and devoutly observed."²

Referring to John viii.47, ("He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God,") Calvin says:

"In fine, as the Church is the kingdom of Christ, and He reigns only by His word, can any person doubt the falsehood of those pretensions, which represent the kingdom of Christ as destitute of His septre, that is, of His holy word?"³

Calvin was also confident that the Roman Church was mistaken in its idea that it could not err. He could find no basis for the doctrine of an infallible Church in Scripture. He was firmly convinced that a Church might remain free from error if it remained loyal in every smallest

¹Institutes IV.iv.4.

²Ibid. IV.ii.3.

³Ibid. IV.ii.4.

detail to Scripture, but this was exactly what the Papists had not done. He backs his argument with an appeal to the person whom they claimed as their first Pope:

"This is a remarkable passage, (II Peter 1.19:) we learn from it how God guides us. The Papists have ever and anon in their mouth that the Church cannot err. Though the word is neglected, they yet imagine that it is guided by the Spirit. But Peter on the contrary intimates that all are immersed in darkness who do not attend to the light of the word. Therefore, except thou art resolved to cast thyself into a labyrinth, especially beware of departing even in the least thing from the rule and direction of the word. Nay, the Church cannot follow God as its guide, except it observes what the word prescribes."¹

When a Church had deliberately given honor to the tradition of men, it was not expected that they should remain free from error. All men were fallible and anything they might devise was sure to deviate from the truth. Only as men listened for the exact words which came from the mouth of God could they expect to be well pleasing in His sight.

The power of the keys was also discussed by Calvin on a scriptural basis. He believed in the doctrine, but was willing to go with it only so far as the authority of Scripture permitted. It was too sacred a matter to be trifled with; it must not be twisted and turned to satisfy

¹Commentary on II Peter 1.19.

every human whim and desire:

"Christ gave commandment to his apostles, and conferred on them the power of remitting sins.In the communion of saints, therefore, sins are continually remitted to us by the ministry of the Church.... Let every one of us, therefore, consider it as his duty, not to seek remission of sins anywhere but where the Lord has placed it."¹

And so we might go on indefinitely. Calvin gives large space in his Institutes to his doctrine of the Church, and it will be impossible to touch upon all of the doctrine here. Enough of it has been dealt with to assure us that he moved forward only as the light of Scripture showed the way. His strict view of revelation and inspiration made him very scrupulous in his task of setting forth to the people the doctrine of the Church which he believed God wanted them to have. He was exceedingly anxious to omit nothing, and just as anxious to include everything which Scripture had taught.

In like manner, Calvin based his doctrine of the sacraments upon Scripture:

"For a sacrament rests on no authority, unless it stands on the certain foundation of the word of God."²

In these words, he not only established the two ordinances which he believed to be sacraments, but swept aside those

¹Institutes IV.i.22.

²Ibid. IV.xvi.1.

rites in the Roman Church which they insisted upon calling sacraments. Baptism and the Lord's Supper he accepted as sacraments, but he firmly rejected confirmation, penance, extreme unction, ecclesiastical orders, and matrimony as sacraments of the Church.

God's Word and the sacraments which He had ordained never overlapped in their ministry to His people. On the other hand, they rather supplemented each other;

"For first, the Lord teaches and instructs us by His word; secondly, He confirms us by His sacraments."¹

It was true that men's faith rested upon the Word, but they received an added incentive to believe in the presence of the sacraments:

"Sacraments, therefore, are exercises which increase and strengthen our faith in the word of God...As an edifice rests on its foundation, and yet, from the addition of pillars placed under it, receives an increase of stability, so faith rests on the word of God as its foundation; but when the sacraments are added to it as pillars, they bring with them an accession of strength."²

In fact, these sacraments are physical signs meant for our dullness, testifying God's "love towards us more expressly than He does by His word."³

The sacraments were on further common ground with

¹Institutes IV.xiv.8.

²Ibid. IV.xiv.6.

³Ibid.

Scripture in that both were dependent upon the illumination of the Holy Spirit for full acceptance on the part of men. No man could fully grasp the meaning of Baptism and the Supper without the Light which only God could give. Full appreciation and appropriation depended upon the activity of God's Spirit in the mind and heart. Calvin was confident that the Lord:

"illuminates our minds by the light of His Holy Spirit, and opens an entrance into our hearts for the word and sacraments; which otherwise would only strike the ears and present themselves to the eyes, without producing the least effect upon the mind."¹

In the Institutes Calvin considers Baptism first. He deals with it in the first place, not only as a sign, but as a means whereby we are furnished with the knowledge and assurance of salvation. This he substantiates by Mark xvi.6, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." He further quotes passages from Ephesians, Titus, and I Peter. The water does not cleanse, but it signifies that we are cleansed by the blood of Christ, which is our salvation.

In the second place, Calvin points out that Baptism is not administered for the sins of the past life only, but "we are washed and purified for the whole of life."²

¹Institutes IV. xiv.8.

²Ibid. IV.xv.3.

This was opposed to the custom of many Papists who waited until the last hours of their earthly existence to receive Baptism in order that they might be cleansed from the sins of their whole lives. This was clearly contrary to the teaching of Scripture, and on this ground Calvin rejected it.

Baptism further, shows us our mortification in Christ,¹ and this belief Calvin supports by an abundance of Scripture passages. And then with equal sanction from God's Word, we are assured that Baptism affords us certain testimony "that we are ingrafted into the life and death of Christ, but are so united as to be partakers of all His benefits."² As for the form of baptism, he believed that immersion was originally practiced but that the form was not necessarily binding upon believers:

"The very word 'baptize', however, signifies to immerse; and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient Church."³

His belief in infant baptism was also substantiated by appeal to the authority of Scripture:

"Now, every one must perceive, that the baptism of infants, which is so strongly supported by the authority of Scripture, is very far from being an invention of men."⁴

¹Institutes IV.xv.5.

²Ibid. IV.xv.6.

³Ibid. IV.xv.19.

⁴Ibid. IV.xvi.8.

And we may be sure that, had he found the practice of infant baptism to have been an invention of men, he would have discarded it in great haste. A doctrine's only excuse for being was its presence in Scripture, and having been discovered there, it was the duty of every Christian to teach and practice it.

The Supper and the Word went hand in hand:

"There is no true administration of the sacrament (of the Supper) without the word. For whatever advantage accrues to us from the sacred supper requires the word; whether we are to be confirmed in faith, exercised in confession, or excited to duty, there is need of preaching."¹

Calvin felt certain that the doctrine which he set forth with regard to the Supper was "in all respects in perfect harmony with the Scripture."² He was opposed to the Roman doctrine of Transubstantiation. It is true, they claimed to have the Scripture on their side in this matter, but Calvin revolted against the literal interpretation which they gave to the famous passage, "This is my body:"

"I confess that they have the word and quote the letter of Scripture; but just as did the Anthropomorphites in past ages, who represented God to be corporeal."³

He argues that Christ would never have promised the coming

¹Institutes IV.xvii.39.

²Ibid.

³Ibid. IV.xvii.25.

of the Holy Spirit had it been possible for His body to remain on earth. Too, the ascension of Christ had proved that He was no longer on earth in the flesh. The Papists had made the sacrament of the Supper:

"an execrable idol...Let us on the contrary, lest we fall into the same danger, fix our ears, our eyes, our minds, and our tongues, entirely on the sacred doctrine of God. For that is the school of the Holy Spirit, the best of all teachers; whose instructions require nothing to be added from any other quarter, and omit nothing of which we ought not to be willing to remain in ignorance."¹

It was not enough that men should base their doctrines upon words of Scripture, it was also necessary that they should use their intelligence and the illumination which the Holy Spirit would furnish, in arriving at the most obvious interpretation of the Word.

And now we have seen how Calvin established the two sacraments of the Church, Baptism and the Supper, upon the authority of Scripture. He had no new sacraments to suggest and no new meanings for those which he had found delivered in Scripture. It was his highest ambition, not that men should receive his ideas, but that they should receive, with fitting humility, the great truths which God had seen fit to reveal in His Word.

¹Institutes IV.xvii.36.

PART III

THE RELATION OF CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE TO
OTHER MEN AND MOVEMENTS

Chapter XV

THE INFLUENCE OF THE FATHERS ON CALVIN'S DOCTRINE

Calvin was a thorough student of the writings of the Fathers. He was heir to their best thoughts upon the subject of religion, and this heritage was one which he not only knew to be available, but one which he took utmost pains to appropriate. The reader of his works is amazed at the frequency with which reference is made to the writings of the Fathers and the large number of Fathers he is able to quote.¹ They seem to constitute for him a great host of witnesses to the truth, and he calls them forth to testify upon any doctrine which he has, at the moment, under consideration.

It is certain that Calvin was influenced by his study of the Fathers but it is impossible to say just to what extent he was influenced by them. While he honored them very highly, he never bound himself over to their opinions entirely. He had a very strong mind of his own and did not hesitate to take issue with anything they had written. There was one norm by which he tested them all,

¹In the Institutes alone, Augustine is quoted two hundred and twenty-eight times. Others quoted in this work are: Ambrose, Anselm, Basil, Bernard, Chrysostom, Cyprian, Cyril, Eusebius, Gregory Nazianzen, Pope Gregory, Hilary, Irenaeus, Jerome, Justin Martyr, Leo, Lombard, Origen, Osiander, Tertullian, Theodoret, Thomas Aquinas, and Valerius Maximus.

viz., Holy Scripture. He would follow them only so long as they followed the Word:

"For, although we hold that the Word of God alone lies beyond the sphere of our judgment, and that Fathers and councils are of authority only in so far as they accord with the rules of the Word, we still give to councils and Fathers such rank and honor as it is meet for them to hold, under Christ."¹

Calvin protested strongly against the charge of the Papists that the reformers despised the Fathers of the Church, their beliefs and traditions. They drew this conclusion merely from the fact that Calvin did not rank tradition on as high a plane as he did Scripture. The doctrine of the infallibility of the Roman Church led the Papists into this high regard for tradition. If the Bible was God's Word, and the deliverances of the Fathers were directed by the Holy Spirit and therefore free from error, then tradition was worthy of the same veneration which they accorded to Scripture. But Calvin did not reason in this manner. The inspiration of the writers of Scripture was a peculiar inspiration, allotted to them alone, and the authority which they held in the life of the Church was unique and unrivaled. Therefore, while he honors and respects the Fathers, and protests against any assertion to the contrary,

¹Tracts, Vol.I, p.66.

he is determined to rest his contentions upon a higher authority than they are able to offer:

"We read them, and learn more from them than you do, but we cannot submit unreservedly to their judgment, because the Word of God forbids us to do so. How can you dare to assert that whoever does not acknowledge the absolute authority of the Fathers thereby rejects all authority whatsoever, even that of the law and the rulers of his country?"¹

The portion of their teaching which he received was the portion which he was able to trace back to Scripture itself. His was not an uncritical acceptance of whatever they wrote.

No one would be rash enough to say that the Fathers are united on a doctrine of Scripture which is identical with the doctrine which Calvin taught. However, the great majority of the Fathers did hold to a strict view of inspiration which in many cases is similar to that held by Calvin. Dr. Warfield points out that:

"Dr. Sanday, in his recent Bampton Lectures on 'Inspiration'...is driven to admit that not only may 'testimonies to the general doctrine of inspiration' from the earliest Fathers, 'be multiplied to almost any extent; but (that) there are some which go further and point to an inspiration which might be described as verbal'; 'nor does this

¹Guizot: St. Louis and Calvin, pp. 215, 216. Quotation from Calvin.

idea', he adds, 'come in tentatively and by degrees, but almost from the very first'.¹

Their combined testimony is one which inspires confidence in the authority of Holy Scripture. They built their systems of doctrine upon it, and whenever they instituted a practice which did not grow directly out of Scripture, they took every precaution to make sure that it did not conflict with anything in Scripture. The Roman Church received its doctrine of the Word from them, and, while they early came to neglect Scripture because of their growing regard for tradition, they did not deliberately give Scripture a minor position, nor did they ever cease to declare their complete acceptance of it as God's Word. Therefore, this generally accepted opinion of the Fathers became a well-defined Church doctrine of Holy Scripture which has come down from the earliest days of the Christian Church. Quoting Dr. Warfield again:

"Thus they themselves (the Higher Critics) introduce us to the fact that over against the numberless discordant theories of inspiration which vex our time, there stands a well-defined Church doctrine of inspiration. This Church doctrine of inspiration differs from the theories that would fain supplant

¹B.B.Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, p.54.

it, in that it is not the invention or the property of an individual, but the settled faith of the universal church of God; in that it is not the growth of yesterday, but the assured persuasion of the people of God from the first planting of the Church until today; in that it is not a protean shape, carving its affirmations to fit every new change in the ever-shifting thought of men, but from the beginning has been the Church's constant and abiding conviction as to the divinity of the Scriptures committed to her keeping...This Church doctrine...looks upon the Bible as an oracular Book, -as the Word of God in such a sense that whatever it says God says...Nor do we need to do more than to remind ourselves that this attitude of entire trust in every word of the Scriptures has been characteristic of the people of God from the very foundation of the Church....The whole body of Christian literature bears witness to this fact."¹

One might be justified in questioning Dr. Warfield's assertion as regards its accuracy for the twentieth century, but it is undoubtedly true of the generation in which Calvin lived. And while every student of Calvin recognizes him to be an independent thinker, it is very evident that he was tremendously influenced by the doctrine of Scripture which the Fathers held, and the Church doctrine for which they were largely responsible.

Now we shall consider briefly some of the specific sayings of certain of the Fathers with regard to their views

¹B.B.Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, pp.52,53.

of Scripture. The Fathers who will be quoted are not the only ones who held a strict doctrine of Scripture, nor are the words quoted in any sense isolated cases; the Fathers and the quotations are merely representative of the general view of Scripture which may be gleaned from an impartial reading of the literature which the Fathers have given us.

We shall begin with Polycarp. He considered the Scriptures the very voice of the Most High, and pronounced him the first-born of Satan, "whosoever perverts these oracles of the Lord", (Ep. ad Phil., cap.vii.)¹ Here we have a witness to the source and sanctity of God's Word which finds an echo in Calvin. We have seen that he too refers to Scripture as the "Sacred Oracles", believing them to have come to the ear of man from the mouth of God. Calvin was just as vigorous in his denunciation of those who would twist the Word according to their own needs and desires. Such persons used the Scripture as though it were a "nose of wax", and Calvin considered it a direct sin against God.

Turning to Irenaeus, the pupil of Polycarp, we find that he taught that "the Scriptures are perfect, seeing that they are spoken by God's Word and His Spirit,"

¹Quoted by Dr. B.B.Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, p.54.

(Adv. Haer. ii.28.)¹ Calvin's doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture is in perfect accord with this, and rests upon the same argument: Scripture was free from error because it was exclusively God's Word. If God was perfect, then His Word would be perfect. Time and time again he tells us that Scripture partakes of the very nature of God, and therefore we should reverence it as we reverence Him. Irenaeus infers that the exclusion of human writers insures the exclusion of error, and this is a point which Calvin declares very frankly.

Commenting on Psalm cx.1, the same author writes:

"Since, therefore, the Father is truly Lord, and the Son truly Lord, the Holy Spirit has fitly designated them by the title of Lord."²

And on Psalm xlv.6, he writes:

"For the Spirit designates both by the name of God."³

Here we have nothing short of a theory of verbal inspiration. He depicts the Holy Spirit as selecting certain words for His use. This is Calvin's custom exactly. Several illustrations of this have been quoted in an

¹Quoted by Dr. B.B.Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, p.54.

²The Writings of Irenaeus, Vol.I, p. 269.

³Ibid.

earlier chapter of this thesis. He went into great detail to explain what the Holy Spirit meant by a certain word in a certain place. Such a theory precludes any method of inspiration other than dictation. The human writers were allowed no freedom in phrasing the message. God not only knew the message he desired His people to receive, but the best form in which it should be couched. Irenaeus evidently thought, as Calvin certainly did, that even this liberty would open the door for the entrance of error. Men were so prone to error that any freedom granted to them imperiled the finished product.

In the writings of Tertullian we receive a foreglow of Calvin's doctrine of accommodation:

"And to such a degree has the Holy Ghost made this the rule of His Scripture, that whenever anything is made out of anything, He mentions both the thing that is made and the thing of which it is made....The Holy Ghost took upon Himself so great a concern for our instruction."¹

Here we have the Holy Spirit in the role of Teacher, a figure which Calvin used so often. Frequently he spoke of Scripture being the "School of the Holy Spirit." Both authors believed that God, by a slow and painstaking process, was leading His chosen people into the great

¹Writings of Tertullian, Vol. II, pp.86,87.

light of His truth. They were truly His children, and it was natural that He should feel the responsibility of instructing them. Was it not His purpose that they should grow into His likeness, a likeness which they had once possessed, but, through the sin of one man, had marred?

In consideration of Origen, we discover that he wrote at some length on the subject: "That the Scriptures Are Divinely Inspired," and arrived at the conclusion:

"that the Holy Spirit, by the providence and will of God...enlightened the ministers of truth, the prophets and apostles, to understand the mysteries of those things or causes which take place among men, or with respect to men."¹

However, he makes bold to assert that he is not bound to any system of literal interpretation, believing:

"that it was the design of the Holy Spirit, who deigned to bestow upon us the sacred Scriptures, to show that we were not to be edified by the letter alone,....for in that way not only absurdities, but impossibilities, would be the result."²

This point of view was shared by Calvin in many instances but he did not make it a hard and fast rule. There were

¹Writings of Origen, Vol.I, p.274.

²Ibid. p.332.

times when he firmly revolted against the literalism of many, particularly the Anthropomorphists, but there were other times when he considered a literal interpretation to be necessary. Calvin's only criteria in this regard was the mind of the Holy Spirit. He was not so concerned with "absurdities" and "impossibilities." The wisdom of man was foolishness with God, and nothing was impossible with God, so the only thing that mattered was to find out the exact truth which the Spirit intended to convey.

Origen also taught that the Holy Spirit was co-worker with the Evangelists in the composition of the Gospels, that, therefore, lapse of memory, error or falsehood, was impossible to them, (Cf. his words on Matt. xvi.12, and John vi.18.)¹ Here again, we have the theory of scriptural inerrancy which Calvin taught. From earliest times, these leaders in the Church seemed to feel the need of an authority beyond which there was no appeal.

As for Hippolytus, we find him stressing the conviction that spiritual truths must be spiritually discerned. On Proverbs 1.3, he writes:

"Wherefore he says: 'To understand the difficulties of words;' for things spoken in strange language by the Holy Spirit become intelligible to those who have their hearts right with God."²

¹B.B.Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, p.54.

²Writings of Hippolytus, Vol.I, p.430.

Again we have the conception of the Holy Spirit speaking, leaving no place for a consideration of the human element.

Chrysostom gives expression to an idea which is clearly the forerunner of Calvin's contention that the apostles and prophets were merely the "organs" of the Holy Spirit:

"The mouth by which God speaks, is the mouth of God. Just as our mouth is the mouth of our soul, though the soul has no mouth, so the mouth of the Prophets is the mouth of God."¹

Calvin carried this doctrine to the extreme, asserting that God completely controlled the tongues of those who acted as His amanuenses. They were passive agents, penning only the exact words which they received from God Himself.

The last Father we shall consider is Augustine. It is a well-established fact that Calvin was an unmistakable disciple of Augustine. He frequently says that he might quote Augustine's words as his very own, since he is in such complete agreement with the teaching of Augustine. He refers to him more than to any other Father, and seems to recognize in him the finest expression of the

¹The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol.XI, p.127.

Christian faith since the apostles themselves. One finds in Calvin many of the ideas about Scripture which Augustine espoused. For instance, Augustine looked upon the canonical books of Scripture with so much reverence and honor that he most "firmly believes that no one of their authors has erred in anything, in writing," (Ep. ad Hier. lxxxii.3.)¹ This inerrancy was based upon his strict doctrine of inspiration, as was true of Calvin:

"It is said in a certain place of the Psalms, 'The fear of the Lord is chaste, enduring forever,'...Does this Epistle contradict him, when it sayeth, 'There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear?' Let us question both utterances of God. One is the Spirit, though the books two, though the tongues two....If two pipes filled by one breathing sound in unison, can two tongues filled with the Spirit or Breathing of God make a dissonance? There is then an unison there, there is a harmony, only it requires one that can hear."²

Nothing that Calvin has said about the Scriptures goes beyond this. Inspiration for him was truly the process whereby God breathed into His selected writers the message which they were to deliver to the world. He interpreted Psalm viii, verse 3, ("The heavens, the works of thy fingers",) as signifying the "Scriptures, which Thou,

¹St. Augustine on John, Vol. II, p.1210.

by the operation of the Holy Ghost, hast written by thy ministers."¹

There were a number of Papists who insisted that Augustine based his belief in the authority of the Scriptures upon the consent of the Church, but Calvin believed that he had given conclusive proof to the contrary. It has been pointed out by one author that "in many places he (Augustine) exalts the Holy Scriptures above the opinions of all teachers, above the decrees of all councils and churches, and will have men judge of him and of the teachings of all men according to the Scriptures."²

Two of Calvin's most celebrated doctrines with regard to Scripture seem to be doctrines which he inherited directly from Augustine, viz., the doctrine of accommodation, and the doctrine of the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The first is clearly traced to Augustine by Calvin's reference in the third book of the Institutes:

"It has been shrewdly observed by Augustine, (de Genesi as Literam, Lib. V.,) that we can safely follow Scripture,

¹St. Augustine on Psalms, Vol. I, p.65.

²Holman: Works of Martin Luther, Vol.II, p.451.

which walks softly, as with a mother's step, in accommodation to our weakness."¹

This doctrine Calvin developed to large proportions, using it to explain many difficult passages. The second doctrine mentioned above is also clearly traced to Augustine. In his discussion, in which he denies a dependence upon the Church for the authority of Scripture, Calvin quotes Augustine:

"When I have praised my own creed and ridiculed yours, who do you suppose is to judge between us; or what more is to be done than to quit those who, inviting us to certainty, afterwards command us to believe uncertainty, and follow those who invite us, in the first instance, to believe what we are not yet able to comprehend, that waxing stronger through faith itself, we may become able to understand what we believe - no longer men, but God Himself internally strengthening and illuminating our minds?"³

We can readily see that this was just the doctrine Calvin required in the strenuous days of the Reformation. Strong claims were made on both sides, and the masses were pulled hither and thither by conflicting feelings of allegiance. Calvin believed that a consciousness of the Holy Spirit's presence, leading the bewildered seekers after truth into all truth, would confirm them in the faith which the

¹Institutes, III. xxi.4.

²Ibid. I.vii.3.

reformers were preaching. He was so sure of his message that he was perfectly willing for the Holy Spirit to be the judge.

Now it must be said again, that there is no certain method whereby we may judge to what extent Calvin was influenced by the Fathers. We can only recognize that he was a thorough student of their works, that he was an ardent admirer of many of them, and that many of his ideas regarding Scripture are similar to those set forth by the Fathers. And in recognizing these things, we must also remember that he had firm convictions of his own, and even though he may have adopted some of the ideas of the Fathers, he did it only after he had found foundation in Scripture for them. The Fathers may have suggested these thoughts, but it is certain that Holy Scripture confirmed them.

Chapter XVI

THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIANS AND THEOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS ON CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

When Luther nailed his theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Calvin was eight years of age. In the fifteen years that followed, Luther was able to accomplish his work of struggle and rupture with the Church of Rome. In fact, when Calvin left France and took refuge at Basle in 1534, the German Reformation was established in central and northern Europe. The Confession of Augsburg had been published in 1530; the Protestant princes had entered into the Smalcaldic league in the same year; and the religious peace of Nuremberg had been concluded and ratified by the diet of Ratisbon in 1532. Therefore it would not be an exaggeration to say that the very air which Calvin breathed as a young man was laden with the spirit of the Reformation. The conditions which precipitated the Protestant revolt in Germany were spreading to all adjacent countries. It is only natural to suppose that Calvin was greatly influenced by the rumblings which he heard on the distant horizon - rumblings which grew louder as the disquieting conditions drew nearer. Here was a problem which he must face. He could not remain neutral. The issues were too tremendous to be ignored. His own life and

the life of the community in which he lived was vitally affected by the outcome of such a struggle.

Aside from the general feeling of dissatisfaction which many adherents of the Roman Church experienced at this time, several works had been published by leaders among the Protestants, and these works were being read widely. The Loci Communes of Melanchthon was first published in 1521; Zwingli's Commentarius de vera et falsa religione appeared in 1525; and close upon these, Farel's Sommaire, c'est une briene declaration d'aucuns lieux fort necessaires a une chacun Cretien pour mettre sa confiance en Dieu et a ayder son prochain.

As for translations of the Scriptures, the Pauline Epistles had been published in French in 1512 by Le Fevre and the entire New Testament was ready for publication by 1523. Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament was issued in 1525, and Luther's German New Testament was published in 1522, followed by the Old Testament in 1534.

When we remember that the first edition of Calvin's Institutes was issued in 1536, we can readily see that all of the works mentioned above were available for him. Of course it is impossible to discover just how many of these works he read but it is natural to suppose that his gradually awakening interest in theological matters led him to seek

out any new publications which dealt with these things. It is certain that a new emphasis upon the Bible was in the air. Men were growing weary of their dependence upon the officials of the Church for their knowledge of the Word. They were growing suspicious that all had not been told them. One could clearly see that the new revolt from the arbitrary authority of the papacy was to be the one which had its roots in and received its inspiration from a larger understanding of the Scriptures. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Calvin sensed the situation in a short time, and this we do know, that he lost no time in dedicating all of his energy to the task of making the Bible and its message more available to the masses of men.

Calvin had been fortunate as a youth in having as one of his teachers a man of thoroughly evangelical spirit.— Mathurin Cordier. Calvin came under his influence when he went with the young Montmors to Paris to finish his studies in the College de la Marche. Cordier was one of the "regents" of this college and has been described by Doumergue as "not only the pedagogue of his time but the founder of modern pedagogy."¹ He thought that the teacher should aim at instilling into his scholars the

¹C. H. Irwin: John Calvin.

Word of God and the love of Christ. Calvin's love for Scripture must have taken root during these days of instruction, and perhaps in the years that followed he was inspired by the memory of his great teacher who put his major emphasis upon the truths of God's Word.

Dean Farrar believes that "Calvin was more indebted to Bucer than any one else," especially as regards the composition of his Commentaries. "In his Dedication to the Gospel Harmony he says, 'Bucerum praesertim..... eximium Ecclesiae doctorem sum imitatus.'"¹ The first edition of Bucer's Evangelienkommentar appeared in 1527 and Professor Walker believes that Calvin made this work his own, the Institutes resulting. It is certain that Calvin, in the first edition of his Institutes adopts Bucer's idea that election was the strengthening confidence of the Christian life.² One of Luther's biographers has said:

"Thanks to Bucer, Calvin's opinions, which in the main had always been Lutheran, had been directed more toward that form of Lutheranism represented by Bucer and Melancthon."³

It is practically impossible to pick out the exact portion

¹F.W.Farrar,D.D.: History of Interpretation, p.342.

²Williston Walker: John Calvin.

³Grisar: Luther, Vol.V, pp. 399,400.

of Bucer's thought which influenced Calvin's doctrine of Scripture, but we are certain that Bucer's fidelity to Scripture must have made some impression upon Calvin. It is unreasonable to believe that Calvin was able to admire Bucer's thought without ascertaining the source of his thinking. And it is only natural to suppose that Calvin lost no time in going to this same source in search of a basis for his own thinking.

No study of the influences which combined to shape Calvin's system of doctrine would be complete without a consideration of Zwingli. While Calvin never admired Zwingli extravagantly, he was familiar with the latter's place in the Reformation movement and did agree with him on many points. Since Zwingli was an older man, it is quite reasonable to suppose that Calvin gave earnest attention to his teachings. And here, again, we are face to face with one who gave great honor to the Scriptures and who fed his soul upon them from his earliest years. We are told by one of his biographers that he "poured over the Old and New Testaments....He copied Paul's Epistles, and committed them to memory....Afterwards, he dealt in some way with all the books which make up the New Testament."¹

¹Jackson: Works of Zwingli, Vol.I, p.5.

We know too that on September 6, 1522, Zwingli preached a sermon on the Bible to the Augustinian nuns of the Otenbach convent in Zurich. The title of the Sermon was, On the Perspicuity and Certainty, or Infallibility, of the Word of God.¹ In his writings he lists twelve points of doctrine to which he adheres, and adds:

"The above I firmly believe, teach and maintain, not by my own utterances, but by those of the Word of God; and, God willing, I promise to do this as long as the mind controls these members, unless someone from the declarations of Holy Scripture, properly understood, explain and establish the reverse as clearly and plainly as we have established the above. For it is no less agreeable and delightful than fair and just for us to submit our judgement to the Holy Scriptures."²

He here takes his stand unequivocally upon the authority of Scripture. He is willing to acknowledge his best judgments to be false if some one is able to prove that they are contrary to the deliverances of Scripture. He has no hesitancy in saying that he is liable to err but he infers that Scripture is always right and it is the chief business of the expositor to find out exactly what it says:

Zwingli preceded Calvin in his low opinion of man's ability to produce anything of lasting worth or to arrive at unquestionable truth. On one occasion he wrote:

¹Jackson: Huldreich Zwingli, p.173

²Hinke: Works of Zwingli, Vol.II, p.58.

"For every man is a liar, And unless something else be taught by inspiration of God than what he himself either knows or desires, nothing is to be hoped of him than that he will be destroyed by his own arts and plans...But whence can this be sought but from His oracles? Be not averse, therefore, to the opinions of those who rely upon God's Word."¹

It was simply an impossibility for a human being to produce absolute truth. His very nature made falsehood a certainty. If the right path of life would be marked out for him, it was necessary that God should mark it out. If a way of salvation should be made known among men, then God must make it known. Only destruction waited for those who put their dependence upon their own resources. There was only one alternative: that of giving attention to Scripture and thereby receiving eternal truth, or rejecting Scripture and thereby being hopelessly lost.

Zwingli also preceded Calvin in his belief in the illumination of the Holy Spirit. He believed that "the only source of the knowledge of God, in the full and Christian sense of such a word, is, therefore, the 'mouth of God', by which term Zwingli designates the Bible, illuminated to the reader by the Spirit in his heart."² God had not only spoken but had sent His Spirit as the Interpreter of His

¹Jackson: Huldreich Zwingli, p. 482.

²Ibid. p.371.

message. This, of course, was a doctrine which Calvin developed at great length in his writings. This was the ground upon which he based his claim that the Scriptures were for all the people, both learned and unlearned. God would lead, by His Spirit, even the humblest into all truth.

Turning now to Luther, we shall consider one for whom Calvin had the highest admiration. He esteemed him far higher than he did Zwingli. "If we compare them," Calvin wrote to his friend Guillaume Farel, "Luther towers far above him, as you yourself are well aware."¹ On another occasion he wrote to Bullinger, who was a Zwinglian:

"I implore you never to forget how great a man Luther is. Think with what courage, what constancy, what power he has devoted himself to spreading the doctrine of salvation far and near. As for me, I have often said, and I say it again, though he should call me devil, I would still give him due honor, and recognize him as a mighty servant of the Lord."²

A little later Calvin went beyond even this. He wrote to Luther:

"If I could only fly to you and enjoy your society, even for a few hours!... Farewell, then, most illustrious man, eminent minister of Christ, father forever venerable to me."³

¹Grisar: Luther, Vol.V, p.400.

²Guizot: St.Louis and Calvin, p.243.

³Ibid.

Luther was also acquainted with Calvin and his writings which were doing so much to further the work of the Reformation. In a letter to Bucer dated April 16, 1539, Luther says:

"Greet Herren John Sturm and John Calvin warmly for me, whose writings I read with great pleasure."¹

Luther had no well-defined doctrine of Scripture and was frequently inconsistent with himself. Sometimes his words seem to indicate that his doctrine of Scripture was as strict as Calvin's, while at other times he seems to be possessed of an unrestrained desire to discredit portions of the Word. It is very probable indeed that Calvin was influenced by Luther but it is certain that he used great discrimination in the matter of accepting Luther's conclusions.

As a young man, Luther had become well versed in the Scriptures. One of his biographers tells us that the young monk immersed himself more and more in the study of his beloved Bible and "in his preference for reading the Bible and studying its interpretation, he neglected the rest of his theological education."² Therefore his teacher, Usingen, was obliged to protest against the one-sided study of the sacred text. "So full was Luther of the most sacred

¹Currie: Letters of Martin Luther, p.369.

²Grisar: Luther, Vol. I, p.14.

books, that he was able (at least this is what he says later) to show the wondering brothers the exact spot in his ponderous red volume where every subject, nay every quotation, was to be found."¹ When Luther, at the age of twenty-nine, was installed into a professorship of theology with the degree "Doctor of Theology", he made it known that "he preferred to be called a 'Doctor of the Holy Scriptures'."² Albert Weiss has said (Denifle-Weiss, 2, p.331,) that "Luther had rightly recognized what harm resulted from the regrettable neglect of Holy Scripture on the part of so many theologians, and therefore he chose as his watchword the cry for the improvement of theology by a return to the Bible."³

Many of Luther's deliverances on the subject of Holy Scripture in later years reflect his early devotion to and mastery of the Bible. He courageously challenged the authority of popes and councils and declared in no uncertain terms that all of these must test their conclusions by the Word of God. He, as Calvin did later, set up Scripture as a norm for all things:

"All that the pope decrees and does I
will receive, on this condition, that
I first test it by the Holy Scriptures.

¹Grisar: Luther, Vol.I, p.14.

²Jacobs: Martin Luther, p.42.

³Grisar: Luther, Vol.I, p.134.

He must remain under Christ, and submit to be judged by the Holy Scriptures."¹

He was confident that the humblest believer "who has better grounds and authority from Scripture on his side, is more to be believed than the Pope or a whole Council."²

He affirmed that "no one must go against God's Word - whether he be Pope, Bishop, Emperor, or Prince."³

Luther believed that tradition had its place and proper importance but he unhesitatingly declared that Scripture should be given the first place:

"For those things which have been delivered to us by God in the Sacred Scriptures must be sharply distinguished from those that have been invented by men in the Church, it matters not how eminent they be for saintliness and scholarship."⁴

Tradition was the very thing against which Luther had revolted. It was as he studied the Scriptures that he came to see how far removed the Roman Church had become from the teachings of God's Word. The Bible had opened his eyes to the fact that many of the practices of the Papists were not only unwarranted by Scripture but were contrary to the direct teachings of the Word.

¹Holman: Works of Martin Luther, Vol.I, p.391.

²Grisar: Luther, Vol. IV, p.387.

³Currie: Letters of Martin Luther, p.93.

⁴Holman: Works of Martin Luther, Vol.II, p.261.

The extent to which he followed the teachings of the Fathers also depended upon the extent to which they followed the words of Scripture. His great respect for them did not blind his eyes to the danger which waited for those who forsook the message of the Bible. In his reply to King Henry VIII in 1522, he says:

"Against all the sayings of the Fathers, against all the arts and words of angels, men and devils, I set the Scriptures and the Gospel...Here I stand and here I defy them....The Word of God I count above all else and the Divine majesty supports me; hence I should not turn a hair were a thousand Augustines against me, and am certain that the true Church adheres with me to God's Word."¹

It was not that he honored the Fathers less but that he honored the Scriptures more. He further says:

"For all writing should point to the Scriptures, as John pointed to Christ, when he said, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.'.....Neither Fathers nor councils nor we ourselves shall do so well, even when our very best is done, as the Holy Scriptures have done; that is to say, we shall never do so well as God Himself."²

This leads us to a consideration of Luther's belief as to the source of Scripture. He gives frequent expression to his belief that God was its Author. He readily

¹Grisar: Luther, Vol.IV, p.391.

²Holman: Works of Martin Luther, Vol.I, p.8.

recognized the fact that the Scriptures were written by men but he was just as sure that they "are not of men nor from men, but from God."¹ In another place he gives one of his reasons for such a belief:

"That the Bible is the Word of God and not of man, that it is God's book and not man's, is proved by the fact that all things in the world, what they are and how they are conditioned, are described in the book of Genesis by Moses, and everything remains as God created it."²

One would naturally be inclined to interpret this saying as meaning that the human element in Scripture is lacking or certainly negligible. It is plain that he considered Moses to be merely the organ of the Holy Spirit.

Luther believed the Scriptures to be indispensable since they constituted the basis upon which one's faith must rest. If one should give him the alternative of choosing between Scripture and faith, his choice would rest upon Scripture. He makes this declaration explicitly:

"Tell me: Which is the greater, the Word of God or faith? Is not the Word of God the greater? For the Word does not depend upon faith, but it is faith that is dependent upon God's Word. Faith wavers and changes; but the Word of God abides forever."³

¹Holman: Works of Martin Luther, Vol.II, p.455.

²Smith and Gallinger: Conversations With Luther, p.175.

³Holman: Works of Martin Luther, Vol. I, pp.54,55.

It is very probable that he is thinking of the Roman Church in this regard. Their faith was continually being changed because of the esteem in which the decisions of men were held. Each new council or pope might add to or subtract from the sum total of the articles of faith of the Church. But the Scriptures remained the same. They were the unchanging source of spiritual truth upon which all men might depend. For this reason Luther was willing to embrace the Word with all confidence:

"One must hold fast to the Word, so that if I should behold all the angels and hear them telling me not to believe some verse of Scripture, not only ought I not to be moved by them, but I ought to close my eyes and ears, for they would be unworthy of being looked upon or listened to."¹

One finds that Luther was also a firm believer in the sufficiency of Scripture. He did not feel that it was necessary to go beyond its pages for any knowledge upon truths pertaining to the spiritual life. On one occasion he referred to the Word as "the Holy Scriptures, in which we are abundantly instructed about all things."² He was also assured that "the Bible contains more than enough directions for all our living."³ However, this sufficiency was

¹Smith and Gallinger: Conversations With Luther, p.177.

²Holman: Works of Martin Luther, Vol.I, p.391.

³Ibid., p.148.

as exclusive as it was inclusive. We find him declaring: "But whatever is without warrant of Scripture is hazardous and should by no means be commended to anyone."¹ Truly it had been the extra-biblical practices that had corrupted the papacy, and Luther was determined to keep these destructive agents out of the Reformation movement.

While Luther did not develop the doctrine of the witness of the Holy Spirit, he touched upon it and evidently held to it. In his works we read:

"Each man must believe solely because it is the Word of God and because he feels within that it is true, even though an angel from heaven and all the world should preach against it."²

He further summarizes his belief in these words:

"The Romanists say, How can we know this or that to be true and God's word? We must learn it from the Pope and the Councils. Very well, Let them decree and say what they will, still say I, Thou canst not rest thy confidence thereon nor satisfy thy conscience. Thou must thyself decide. Thy life is at stake. Therefore must God say unto thee in thine heart, This is God's word, else it is still undecided."³

Too much depended upon Scripture for men to be uncertain about its authenticity. It dealt with matters of eternal import. The destiny of men's souls rested upon its

¹Holman: Works of Martin Luther, Vol.I, p.240.

²Grisar: Luther, Vol.IV, pp.391,392.

³Reyburn: John Calvin, p.351.

deliverances. It was not enough that a pope or a group of ecclesiastics should give it their sanction - they were as liable to err as any other men - it was necessary that we have God's own attestation to His Word.

And as for illumination, Luther expressed himself as believing in it. He set forth his conviction that "No one can rightly understand God or the Word of God unless he receives it directly from the Holy Ghost."¹

The above quotations have set forth the portion of Luther's thinking which undoubtedly influenced Calvin to a large extent. But Luther contradicted himself frequently and Calvin had given no guarantee that he would follow Luther blindly. From the great storehouse of Luther's opinions, Calvin carefully selected those thoughts which seemed most adequate for his own use and the best interests of the people to whom he ministered. We will now look at the other side of Luther, the side which is contrary to the side just presented, and the side which represents most clearly the difference between the two great reformers, Luther and Calvin.

Luther had no hesitancy in expressing his dislike for a certain book of Scripture. When he was correcting his version of II Maccabees he remarked that he was "so hostile

¹Grisar: Luther, Vol.IV, p.392.

to this book and to Esther that I wish they did not exist; they are too much Jewish and heathen nonsense."¹ No amount of persuasion would ever have forced Calvin to have made a statement like this. To have spoken a word against the book of Esther would have been, for him, an insult to the Holy Spirit whose word he believed it to be. Calvin, too, would have dealt with this book and others in a more scholarly, reasonable manner. Luther allowed his biased mind to have free play, and frequently his chief objection to a book was its apparent disagreement with one of his cherished doctrines. This was certainly the case with regard to the book of James. Because this canonical Epistle seems contrary to his doctrine of justification by faith, he affirms that "its style is far beneath the dignity of an Apostle and is not to be compared with that of Paul" (Werke, Weim. ed., 2, p.425.)² This was a lame excuse for rejecting it and one is surprised that a man of Luther's intelligence would resort to such tactics. In another place he says:

"Hence the Epistle of James is nothing but an epistle of straw in comparison with them, (epistles of Paul and others,) for it has nothing evangelical about it" (Preface of 1522, Werke, Erl. ed. 63, p. 114 f.)³

¹Smith and Gallinger: Conversations With Luther, p.182.

²Grisar: Luther, Vol. IV, p.389.

³Ibid., Vol. V, pp.522,523.

Grisar points out that he repeats his condemnation in the commentary on Genesis and even goes so far as to remark bitterly that James was mad (delirat) with his crazy doctrine of works, (Opp. lat. exeg., 5, p.227, on Genesis xxi.)¹ In the marginal notes to his private copy of the New Testament he says of James ii.12, "Oh what a chaos" (Werke, Walchs ed. 9, p 2774 ff.)² We know, too, that he allowed James, Jude, Hebrews, and the Apocalypse to count only as an appendix to the New Testament.

In a further way Luther may be said to differ with Calvin in that he never

"attributed to the Bible law-making authority for the political and social life. Thus he also freed secular law from the tutelage of the letter of the Bible. He did this by asserting that all legal prescriptions of Holy Writ have lost binding force for the Christians, and that they are important only as examples of the traditional legislation."³

And thus we have two great religious leaders differing to a marked degree concerning the Book which both of them put at the very center of their teachings. Luther's position may well have confused many of his followers. They were accustomed to the practice of neglecting the Word -

¹Grisar: Luther, Vol. V, pp.522,523.

²Ibid.

³Bohmer: Luther in the Light of Recent Research, pp.303,304.

the Church from which they had revolted was notorious for this - but it was a new thing to see men take issue with books which they considered to be inspired of God. Perhaps that is one reason why Calvin had to work the harder, viz., that he might encourage profound respect for every word of Scripture. It is certain that he considered this to be the only wise course to pursue in the great task which he had undertaken.

There is no ground for saying that Calvin got all his ideas from Luther or from anyone else, but it is certainly reasonable to believe that he gave the teachings of Luther and others due consideration and perhaps in many cases was influenced to a large degree by the conclusions which they had reached.

Chapter XVII

THE INFLUENCE OF CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE ON CONTEMPORARY MEN AND MOVEMENTS

Calvin's co-workers in the cause of Protestantism found in him an unfailing source of encouragement, a sturdy tower of strength. If they were ever inclined to become faint-hearted they had only to look at him, and the very glint in his eye sent them back to their tasks with renewed hopefulness. If he was ever given to pessimism he kept the fact to himself; if he had doubts he did not share them. Once he had put his hand to the plow he never looked back; once he became convinced that he was doing God's will, he never doubted the presence of God's guidance and power. He considered himself to be merely an instrument of the Almighty and he was confident that "they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Nehemiah's assurance that "Our God will fight for us" was his own abiding source of comfort and courage. His fearless sermons, his clear-cut expositions of Scripture both in his Institutes and in his Commentaries, and his unswerving loyalty to the will of God as he saw it, all attracted the attention of his contemporaries and naturally marked him out as a leader among men. The forceful personality of the man lent weight to his ideas and his words appeared to be clothed with an

unmistakable authority. His influence became widespread and men found themselves accepting his leadership and imbibing his doctrines. His basic doctrine was, of course, his doctrine of Holy Scripture, and this doctrine vitally affected the thinking of many who had the opportunity of influencing multitudes in Calvin's own community and in the outlying regions beyond.

Calvin's own successor, Beza, was one of those who found the great reformer's spirit and thinking so contagious. One not only detects Calvin's influence in Beza's writings, but Beza, himself, bears witness to his indebtedness to Calvin. Speaking of his Confession of My Faith, he says:

"These same subjects, I confess, have been happily set forth by many writers, especially in this century of ours, and indeed among the first....by that great John Calvin, my second parent."¹

We hear many echoes of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture in Beza's speech at the Colloquy of Poissy. He says to the king:

"You will find in us...a mind tractable and ready to receive everything that shall be proved by the pure Word of God....We receive as the Word of God only the teachings recorded in the books of the prophets and apostles, called the Old and New Testaments...."

¹Walker: John Calvin, Beza's letter to Wolmar, p.366.

As to the writings of the ancient doctors and councils, before receiving them without dispute, we should have first to make them accord altogether with the Scriptures....We therefore receive the Holy Scriptures as a complete declaration of everything needful for our salvation. As to what may be found in councils or in the books of the doctors, we cannot and ought not to prevent you, or ourselves, from deriving help from them, provided it be founded on the express testimony of Scripture. But, for the honour of God, do not bring up to us their bare authority, without trying everything by this touchstone."¹

In this declaration we see a willingness to accept anything that can be found in Scripture; an insistence that all doctrines be tested by the Word of God; and an assurance that the Scriptures are sufficient, containing all those things "needful for our salvation."

Another great name in the Reformation movement is that of John Knox. In Knox one finds many of the characteristics of Calvin, some natural and some, perhaps, acquired. He was equally as fearless in his determination to declare the truth of God as he saw it, and he was, too, one of the greatest preachers of his day. He appears to have had the highest regard for Scripture from earliest years but it is not unlikely that his acquaintance with Calvin's position on the subject, and finally his own association with him,

¹Baird: Theodore Beza, pp.168, 174, 176.

greatly strengthened his conviction and very probably colored it in some respects.¹ In a Letter of Wholesome Counsell which he addressed to the friends of reform in Scotland when, in July 1556, he was about to leave them for a season, his one anxiety was that they should love and search the Scriptures. He wrote:

"Therefore, deare Brethern, if that ye looke for a lyfe to come, of necessitie it is that ye exercise your selfis in the booke of the Lorde youre God. Let no day slyppe or want some comfort receyved from His mouth. Open your eares, and He will speake even pleasant thinges to your hart."²

In the opening paragraphs of the Scots' Book of Discipline he affirms that the Old and New Testaments contain and express "all thingis necessarie for the instructioun of the Kirk and to mak the man of God perfite."³

The stay of Knox in Geneva must have been an inspiring occasion for both Knox and Calvin. We can only think of them as congenial spirits and we are very sure that they had much in common. Well might the forces of Romanism have trembled when two such men came face to face. Two dauntless foes of tradition and friends of Scripture were

¹"Knox est L'homme de la lettre de l'Ecriture Sainte: en effet, lorsqu'il parle de la Bible, il dit toujours: 'The express Word of God', ou bien 'The plane Word of God.'" Mezzner: John Knox et ses rapports avec Calvin, p. 55.

² Smellie: The Reformation in its Literature, p.246.

³ Ibid.

in conference. The Scriptures were for Knox, as they were for Calvin, the only touchstone for doctrine. Said he:

"The Spirit of God doth otherwise teach us, (than to hold to mere tradition.) For the wisdom of God, Christ Jesus Himself, remitted His adversaries to Moses and the Scripture, to try by them whether His doctrine was of God or not. The apostles Paul and Peter commanded men to try the religion which they professed, by God's plain scriptures, and do praise men for so doing....Now seeing that these evident testimonies of the Holy Ghost will (require) us to try our faith and religion by the plain word of God, wonder it is, that the papists will not be content, that their religion and doctrine come under the trial of the same."¹

Knox's Calvinistic view of Scripture is further set before us in the Scots' Confession of Faith. Before dealing with this particular confession it should be noted that the presence of Calvin's influence in nearly all the Reformation confessions is generally recognized. Schaff has said that "Calvin's genius shaped the confessions and constitutions of the Reformed churches in Switzerland, France, Holland, and Great Britain."² The Scots' Confession was composed by the famous "six Johns" but the personality and thinking of John Knox stands out most clearly in it. It strikes the reader as being chiefly his work. The old title declared

¹John Knox: History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland, p. 402.

²Schaff: History of the Christian Church, Vol.VI, p.738.

the Confession to be "The Confessioun of Faith....groundit upoun the infallable trewth of Godis Word."¹ The opening words declare everything necessary for salvation is "sufficientlie expressed" in the Bible - "to wit, in those buikes of the Auld and New Testamentis, quhilk of the ancient have been reputed canonicall....We ought not so meikle to luke what men before us have said or done, as unto that quhilk the haly Ghaist uniformelie speakes within the body of the Scriptures"....He is "in nothing contrarious unto himselfe."² Article XIX is full of ideas which we have seen to be characteristic of Calvin:

"As we beleeve and confesse the scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and make the man of God perfite, so do we affirme and avow the authoritie of the same to be of God, and nether to depend on men nor angelis, (II Tim. iii, 16, 17.) We affirme, therefore, that sik as allege the Scripture to have na uther authoritie bot that quhilk it hes received from the Kirk, to be blasphemous against God, and injurious to the trew Kirk, quhilk alwaies heares and obeyis the voice of her awin Spouse and Pastor, (John x. 27;) bot takis not upon her to be maistres over the samin."³

The sufficiency and authority of Scripture, and the witness of the Holy Spirit, are clearly set forth in this statement of belief. The consent of the Church is given

¹Smellie: The Reformation in its Literature, p. 279.

²Ibid.

³Schaff: Creeds of Christendom, Vol. III, p. 464.

a minor place and the immediate attestation of God to His Word is unmistakably declared. The Scottish Reformation, as that which centered around Geneva, was founded upon the inspired Word of God. The Reformation grew out of the Word and was sustained by it. The courageous preaching of Knox in the presence of royalty and its attendant authority, is only explained on the ground that Knox was confident that he was proclaiming the message of the King of kings and Lord of lords. As he stood behind the sacred desk he seemed to feel that he was an ambassador from the Court of Heaven, and that he was empowered by a Spirit whose presence nerved him for the conflict and gave him assurance of victory.

The Scots' Confession was issued one year after the appearance of Calvin's French Confession, and the following year witnessed the appearance of the Belgic Confession composed by Guy de Bres. Calvin's likeness is stamped over the whole of this document. In Article II we are told that God "makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us (than in His universe) by His holy and divine Word...."¹ These words are practically identical with those used by Calvin in the first few chapters of his Institutes; they sum up in a sentence Calvin's lengthy argument concerning revelation.

¹Schaff: Creeds of Christendom, Vol.III, pp.384-388.

Article III deals with inspiration:

"We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that 'holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost', as the Apostle Peter saith. And that afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the Prophets and Apostles to commit His revealed Word to writing; and He Himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings, holy and divine Scriptures."¹

In Articles IV and V the sixty-six books of the Bible are mentioned separately and a declaration made that all these books are accepted as "holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing, without any doubt, all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves."² This had been the course followed by the French or Gallican Confession composed by Calvin and one of his pupils, and the wording is very much the same.³ As for the conflict between tradition and the Scriptures, the Belgic Confession has the following to say:

"We believe that the Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God....It is unlawful

¹Schaff: Creeds of Christendom, Vol.III, pp.384-388.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

for anyone, though an Apostle to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: 'nay, though it were an angel from heaven' as the Apostle Paul saith....Neither may we compare any writings of men, though ever so holy, with those divine Scriptures; nor ought we to compare custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times or persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, with the truth of God, for the truth is above all."¹

Calvin's view of the sufficiency of Scripture and its primacy over all deliverances of Fathers or councils is clearly presented here. The influence of Calvin upon this document is evident and unmistakable.

A word must now be said with regard to Calvin's influence on the beginnings of the Church of England. The spirit of the Reformation soon spread from Germany, France, and Switzerland to England. Although Henry VIII had published a work written to combat the teachings of Luther, this same King was soon to head a revolt himself against the Church of Rome. Even though domestic matters and the growth of nationalism played a large part in Henry's revolt, it is hardly likely that he would have been so bold had he not received encouragement from the fact that the foremost nations on the continent were already in revolt. After the Church of England had been

¹Schaff: Creeds of Christendom, Vol.III, pp.384-388.

established and Mary had ascended the throne, a reign of terror began for the Protestants which sent many of them to the continent as refugees. This exodus occurred during the days of Calvin's greatest influence and many of them came in contact with him and his teachings. Returning to England under Elizabeth, they naturally brought with them many of Calvin's ideas, disseminating them among their countrymen and incorporating many of them in their ecclesiastical documents. Bishop Horsley bears witness to this belief. Speaking of the Geneva Version of the Holy Scriptures, he says:

"This English translation of the Bible, which is indeed upon the whole a very good one, and furnished with very edifying notes and illustrations, (except that in many points they savor too much of Calvinism,) was made and first published at Geneva, by the English Protestants, who fled thither from Mary's persecution. During their residence there, they contracted a veneration for the character of Calvin, which was no more than was due to his great piety and his great learning; but they unfortunately contracted also a veneration for his opinions - a veneration more than was due to the opinions of an uninspired teacher. The bad effects of this unreasonable partiality, the Church of England feels, in some points, to the present day."¹

These words, coming from such a quarter, constitute a strong testimony to the fact, (often denied,) that the Church of

¹From "Translator's Preface" to Calvin's Commentary on Genesis.

England has, at least, some leaven of Calvinism in its composition.

And a good part of this leaven had to do with the evaluation of Scripture. We have only to turn to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England, published in 1562, for an illustration of this fact. The sections dealing with the Scriptures and the creeds have a marked likeness to Calvin's French Confession. Article VI declares that:

"Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation."¹

Article VII mentions the sixty-six canonical books and affirms acceptance of them, and Article VIII follows with a word as to the creeds:

"The Nicene Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture."²

These two Creeds are mentioned by Calvin in his Confession. It is to be noted, too, that the acceptation of the Creeds

¹Schaff: Creeds of Christendom, Vol.III, p.489.

²Ibid.

is not upon the authority of tradition, or the command of the Church, but upon the authority of Scripture. They are received because they may be proved from the Word.

Further citations might be made to show how large was Calvin's influence, as touching the Scriptures, in his own day, but enough has been touched upon to give us some idea of the place which he filled during those momentous days of the Reformation. Religious leaders of the nations sat at his feet, and no man having come in contact with him remained the same man - when such a man went away he carried much of Calvin with him.

Chapter XVIII

THE INFLUENCE OF CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE ON LATER MEN AND MOVEMENTS

There was no decline in Calvin's influence after his death. On the other hand, it seemed rather to grow from more to more, until now every country in which the Gospel has been preached has felt the impact of his life and teachings.

In the previous chapter we considered two or three of the doctrinal documents which were composed during Calvin's life-time, which documents gave unmistakable evidence that their authors had been influenced by Calvin. We shall turn now to declarations of faith which appeared after the death of Calvin, noting particularly the portions of these declarations which reveal an indebtedness to him.

The Formula of Concord, drawn up in 1576, begins with a statement which deals with the place and importance of Scripture. It affirms that the Word is the "only rule and norm, according to which all dogmas and all doctrines ought to be esteemed and judged."¹ Scripture is declared

¹Schaff: Creeds of Christendom, Vol. III, pp.93-95.

to have a unique place in the realm of religious literature, no other work being allowed to share its place of primacy:

"But other writings, whether of the fathers or of the moderns, with whatever name they come, are in no wise to be equaled to the Holy Scriptures, but are all to be esteemed inferior to them."¹

As for the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, "we publicly confess that we embrace them."²

The Irish Articles of Religion³ are declared to be "Agreed upon by the Archbishops and Bishops, and the rest of the Clergy of Ireland, in the Convocation holden at Dublin in the Year of our Lord God 1615, for the Avoiding of Diversities of Opinions, and the Establishing of Consent touching True Religion." The Scriptures are considered to be the source of their "rule of faith and all saving truth." After listing the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible, this is added:

"All which we acknowledge to be given by the inspiration of God, and in that regard to be of most certain credit and highest authority."

The Word is believed to be "able to instruct sufficiently

¹Schaff: Creeds of Christendom, Vol.III, pp.93-95.

²Ibid.

³Ibid. Vol.III. pp.526-528.

in all points of faith", and this is followed by a statement of acceptance of the three creeds mentioned above, with the assurance that "they may be proved by most certain warrant of holy Scripture."

In 1647 the Westminster Confession of Faith was agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines gathered at Westminster for the purpose. This document has been called by one Church historian a "symbolic expression" of Calvinism.¹ Its influence upon the churches around the globe has been tremendous. Its thirty-two chapters deal with doctrines which spring out of Holy Scripture and each point touched upon is supported by accompanying passages from the Word. Since Scripture is basic throughout, it is the first subject with which the Confession deals. Here, again, one detects an echo of Calvin's Institutes, in that God's revelation in nature is first discussed, followed by the statement that this was "not sufficient to give that knowledge of God....necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord to reveal Himself" more fully, and finally "to commit the same wholly unto writing." In Section IV of this first chapter the authority of Holy Scripture is declared to rest not upon "the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, the author thereof." The

¹Walker: John Calvin, pp. 390, 391.

incomparable excellencies of the Book are not to be overlooked, "yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts." The "inward illumination of the Spirit of God" is also acknowledged to be "necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word." The Testaments in their original languages are declared to have been "immediately inspired by God, and by His signular care and providence kept pure in all ages" and are "therefore authentic." Finally. "the infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself." In this Confession¹ we have a clear and concise statement of the most important points in Calvin's doctrine of Scripture.

The Confession of the Waldenses, issued in 1655, has one section which appears to have been influenced by the teaching of Calvin with regard to Scripture. In Section IV, after acknowledging the divine source of the Word, it affirms that this acknowledgment is based primarily upon "the operation of the Holy Spirit, who causes us to receive with reverence the testimony of the Church in that point, who opens our eyes to discern the beams of that celestial

¹Blackwood's Edition, pp.3-6.

light which shines in the Scripture, and corrects our taste to discern the divine flavor of that spiritual food."¹

George Fox and the Society of Friends were far removed from Calvinism in most of its aspects, but they did retain a profound regard for the Scriptures which in many respects reminds us of Calvin. They did not believe that the Spirit's message was confined to the Scriptures - God might speak at any time to any person - but, for instance, they held to the conviction that God had revealed Himself, had given His truth through inspiration, and gave testimony, by His Spirit, to the authenticity of Scripture. In Section III of the Confession of the Society of Friends we read:

"From these revelations of the Spirit of God to the saints have proceeded the Scriptures of truth....By the inward testimony of the Spirit we do alone truly know them....We do therefore receive and believe the Scriptures, because they proceeded from the Spirit."²

Fox, himself, gives us in his Autobiography his conception of inspiration and illumination which is closely akin to that of Calvin:

"The holy Scriptures were given forth by the Spirit of God; and all people must come to the Spirit of God in

¹Schaff: Creeds of Christendom, Vol.III, pp.758-760.

²Ibid., p. 791.

themselves in order to know God and Christ, of whom the prophets and apostles learnt: and by the same Spirit all men may know the holy Scriptures. For as the Spirit of God was in them that gave forth the Scriptures, so the same Spirit must be in all them that come to understand the Scriptures."¹

George Fox was by no means a Calvinist but that does not preclude the possibility that he may have been unconsciously influenced by the doctrine of Scripture which Calvin and his followers taught.

John Wesley was another religious leader whose views on many points differed from those of Calvin, and yet his statement of his belief as to the nature and source of Scripture might have been written by Calvin himself.

"The Scripture, therefore, is a rule sufficient in itself, and was by men divinely inspired at once delivered to the world; and so neither needs, nor is capable of, any further addition....For as all faith is founded upon Divine authority, so there is now no Divine authority but the Scriptures; and therefore, no one can make that to be of Divine authority which is not contained in them."²

And in the Methodist Articles of Religion, drawn up by Wesley in 1784, we find practically the same thoughts expressed in a different manner.³

¹George Fox: An Autobiography, pp.176,177.

²Wesley's Works, Vol. V, p.769.

³Schaff: Creeds of Christendom, Vol.III, p.808.

In an Evangelical Union Catechism published in 1862, we read in Section III that Scripture is God's "infallible Word; that the Bible was written by "Prophets and Apostles, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and that "the Holy Spirit that inspired the Bible... enables you to understand" it.¹

The Articles of Religion of the Reformed Episcopal Church in America, issued in 1875, declare that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" and "not only does it contain the oracles of God, but it is itself the very oracles of God. And hence it containeth all things necessary to salvation."²

The New Hampshire Baptist Confession of 1883 affirms Scripture to be "a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter....and shall remain to the end of the world.. ..the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried."³

Turning now particularly to individual religious leaders, we shall see that Calvin's high regard for Scripture has not been allowed to perish from the earth.

¹Schaff: Creeds of Christendom, Vol.III, p.832.

²Ibid., pp.815,816.

³Ibid., p.742.

We turn first to Adolphe Monod, the great French Protestant, and we find in him a staunch exponent of Calvin's doctrines of scriptural authority and inerrancy:

"If faith has not for its basis a testimony of God to which we must submit, as to an authority external to our personal judgment, and independent of it, then faith is no faith."¹

And still further:

"The more I study the Scriptures...the more I am convinced, that a testimony of God, placed without us and above us, exempt from all inter-mixture of sin and error which belong to a fallen race, and received with submission on the sole authority of God, is the true basis of faith."²

Looking now at Bunyan, we realize that we are in the presence of one who gave great honor to the Word of God. In his great Pilgrim's Progress we have the following conversation: Christian has been telling Pliable of the joys of the land to which he is travelling and Pliable desires to know more about them;

Christian: Since you desire to know, I will read of them in my book.
Pliable: And do you think that the words of your book are certainly true?
Christian: Yes, verily; for it was made by Him that cannot lie."³

¹Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, p.70. Quotation from Life of Monod.

²Ibid.

³Pilgrim's Progress, p.18 (Religious Tract Society Tercentenary Edition).

The infallibility of Scripture, based upon the belief that it is God's Word and His alone, is clearly set forth here.

Richard Baxter acknowledged his indebtedness to Calvin and expressed his approval of the great reformers ideas. "I know no man," said he, "since the Apostles' days, whom I value and honor more than Calvin, and whose judgment in all things, one with another, I more esteem and come nearer to."¹ This is borne out in what he has to say concerning Scripture:

"Those err that deny it to be God's word, of infallible truth....without human supplements written or oral....How the infallible truth of the Gospel is proved by the sole witness of the Holy Ghost, I have opened so largely in many books, that I must not here repeat it."²

We may gather from this that the witness of the Spirit was a subject upon which he spent much time and upon which he wrote extensively. This in itself shows us how important he considered this doctrine to be.

As for Richard Hooker, he thought of Calvin as "the wisest man that ever the French Church did enjoy since the hour it enjoyed him...For, though thousands were debtors to him, as touching knowledge of this kind, yet he to none, but only to God, the Author of that most blessed fountain,

¹Schaff: History of the Christian Church, Vol.VII, p.287.

²Richard Baxter: A Paraphrase on the New Testament, p.3.

the Book of Life."¹ In these words we have both his view of Calvin and his view of Scripture.

Andrew Fuller agreed with Calvin that God had included in His Word all those things which we needed to know and therefore it seemed blasphemous to seek to know more. He unhesitatingly declares that "we do not aspire to be wise above what is written."² His veneration for the authority of Scripture is clearly set forth in the following words:

"If any man venerate the authority of scripture, he must receive it as being what it professes to be....If the scriptures profess to be divinely inspired, and assume to be the infallible standard of faith and practice, we must either receive them as such, or, if we would be consistent, disown the writers as imposters....New Testament writers bear testimony to the inspiration of the prophets" and "considered their own writings as equally inspired."³

Bishop Wordsworth reasoned that "The New Testament canonizes the Old; the incarnate Word sets His seal on the Written Word. The Incarnate Word is God; therefore the inspiration of the Old Testament is authenticated by God Himself." (Wordsworth, "On the Canon", p. 51, Am.Ed.)⁴

¹Schaff: History of the Christian Church, Vol.VII, p.286.

²Andrew Fuller's Works, p.454.

³Ibid., pp.443,444.

⁴Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, p.212.

Bishop Wilberforce found himself compelled to say that "my belief is this: The whole Bible comes to us as 'The Word of God' under the sanction of God, the Holy Ghost." ("Life of the Rt. Rev. S. Wilberforce, D.D." Vol. III, p.149.)¹

As one reads such statements one seems to see the figure of Calvin dimly outlined on the page. Many great British theologians felt the force of his influence, one of them going so far as to say that "Scripture is fully to be believed as a thing necessary to salvation, though the thing contained in Scripture pertain not merely to the faith, as that Aaron had a beard."² But one need not go back to the writings of long past years for illustrations of Calvin's influence. In an article entitled "Where the Bible is Forever Infallible", published recently in a British magazine, we read:

"In the Bible we hear God speaking to us, always according as we are able to bear it. As a mother talks baby-language to her child, and later on employs language approaching more nearly to the full-grown speech of men; and as, still later on, if she be spared to see her child subjected to some great sorrow or difficulty, she shares with him her insight and her experience, even so in the Bible

¹Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, p.213.

²Preserved Smith: Age of the Reformation, pp.572,573.

do we see God dealing with us according to our fitness, according to the necessities which life as it proceeds discovers to us."¹

Calvin's idea of accommodation is reflected here in an unmistakable way. Remembering our ignorance and weakness, God phrases his message in terms which will have meaning for us.

The Influence of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture has been felt in America from the earliest days of the nation's history. The settlers who landed at Jamestown in 1607 and at Plymouth in 1620 were alike animated by a spirit which was truly Calvinistic. In the Foreword of a recent historical treatise, Ralph H. Gabriel has this to say:

"Calvinism, that faith of the Mayflower folk, was the basis of the beliefs not only of the Puritans of New England, the Dutch of New York, the Moravians of Pennsylvania, and the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who in the eighteenth century guarded the frontier from Pennsylvania to the Carolinas, but even the Anglican doctrines of the planters south of the Potomac were colored by it."²

These early settlers were strengthened and encouraged by the promises of God recorded in His Word. A lesser faith would not have been sufficient for those who found it necessary to face savage hosts and to suffer the untold hardships incident to becoming established in a new world.

¹British Weekly, January 9, 1930.

²Weigle: American Idealism, p.2.

The theocracy based upon Scripture which Calvin instituted at Geneva became a model for the early government of New England. Every citizen was taxed for the upkeep of the churches; laws were passed which fixed severe punishment for such misdemeanors as blasphemy, idolatry, profaning the Lord's Day, etc. Their ideal was a "free Church in a free state, both subject to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures....One of the first ministers of the Church at Hartford, (Connecticut) Samuel Stone, commenting upon the regard which the people had for the competence of their ministers to interpret to them the will of God, said that a Congregational church was 'a speaking aristocracy in the face of a silent democracy.'"¹ Calvin had said many years before that "They are deceived who expect long prosperity in a kingdom which is not ruled by the sceptre of God, that is to say, by His Holy Word",² and the New England colonists believed this with all their souls.

Early American education was also vitally affected by Calvinism. The whole curriculum of the early schools centered around the Holy Scriptures. The average schoolboy "had only a catechism or primer, a Psalter, and a Testament or Bible."³ Scripture was considered to be the only means

¹Weigle: American Idealism, p.34.

²Letter to Francis in his Institutes.

³Johnson: Old Time Schools and School Books, p.14.

of keeping alive the religious life of the community and overcoming the wiles of Satan. In 1642, twelve years after the settlement of Boston, the General Court of Massachusetts enacted a law fostering the cause of education. The Preamble starts as follows:

"It being one chiefe project of y^t ould deluder, Sathan, to keepe men from the knowledge of y^e Scriptures," effort must be made to thwart this "ould deluder y^t learning may not be buried in y^e grave of or fath^{rs} in y^e church and commonwealth."¹

One of the first text-books used was Nathaniel Strong's England's Perfect School-Master, published in London in 1647. In his Epistle to the reader, the author has this to say: "By this Book a Lad may be taught to read a Chapter perfectly in the Bible in a quarter of a years time."² The teaching of children to read was frequently begun by the use of the hornbook, which was not a book, but a flat piece of wood with a handle. On the face was placed a piece of vellum or paper on which the lesson was inscribed, and this was covered by a thin sheet of transparent horn, held by narrow strips of brass. The characteristic hornbook contained the alphabet, the benediction, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy

¹Johnson: Old Time Schools and School Books, p.14.

²Ibid., p.22.

Ghost. Amen.", and the Lord's Prayer.¹

The famous New England Primer was published in Boston sometime between the years 1687 and 1690. It was "for one hundred years the schoolbook of the dissenters of America, and for another hundred was frequently re-printed." It was chiefly biblical, teaching the alphabet by little verses with allusions to Scripture narratives, and containing the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Some of the rhymes are expressive of Calvinistic theology. For instance, for the letter A, we read, "In Adam's Fall We sinned all." For B, "Thy Life to mend, This Book attend." The latter is accompanied by a picture of the Bible. Many are the Scripture references: for O, "Young Obadiah, David, Josiah, All were pious"; for P, "Peter denies His Lord, and cries"; for Q, "Queen Esther sues, And saves the Jews", for S, "Samuel anoints Whom God appoints"; etc. One of the poems in the little book is entitled, "Praise to God for learning to Read." Among the stanzas are these:

"The Praises of my Tongue
I offer to the Lord,
That I was taught and learnt so young
To read his holy Word.

"That I was brought to know
The Danger I was in,
By Nature and by Practice too
A wretched slave to Sin.

¹Johnson: Old Time Schools and School Books, p.22.

"That I was led to see
I can do nothing well;
And whither shall a Sinner flee
To save himself from Hell.

"Dear Lord this Book of thine,
Informs me where to go
For Grace to pardon all my Sin,
And make me holy too.

"O may that Spirit teach,
And make my heart receive
Those Truths which all thy Servants preach,
And all thy Saints believe!"

Another section of the book has twenty-six verses of Scripture, each verse beginning with one of the letters of the alphabet. Another poem begins:

"Though I am young, a little one,
If I can speak and go alone,
Then I must learn to know the Lord
And learn to read his holy word."

This little Primer¹ is the finest illustration we have of Calvin's influence upon early American education. This influence persisted until secularization of the public schools took place and the curricula of these schools were emptied of any religious content.

Of course early American preaching and theology were vitally affected by the Calvinistic heritage which these settlers possessed. John Cotton, Richard, Increase, and Cotton Mather, and Jonathan Edwards, were glowing examples

¹The New England Primer, Twentieth Century Reprint, Ginn and Company.

of this fact. Edwards has been compared to Calvin as a theologian and to Knox as a preacher. It is true that he had a great following, that he was largely responsible for the Great Awakening, humanly speaking, and that all he preached and believed he based upon the Word of God. Like Calvin, he considered the entire Book to be the message which God, Himself, had spoken, and therefore has no hesitancy in referring to any passage of Scripture as the immediate Word of God, even though God is not being quoted at the time. Speaking of the verse of Scripture, "Ye are the temple of the Holy Ghost", Edwards says:

"Whereas, as it is expressed, it serves as well to practice, if we will believe what God says, that, some way or other, we are inhabited by the Holy Ghost as a temple."¹

Later preachers and religious movements gave evidence of a regard for Scripture which was strikingly Calvinistic. The dictum of Thomas Campbell who, with his son, Alexander, was responsible for the organization of the denomination known as the Disciples, was this: "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak, and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent."² It was upon this basis that they desired to bring about a united Church in the United States.

¹Edwards' Works, Vol.III, p.179.

²Fortune: A Historical Sketch of the Disciples, p.2.

Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist, testified to his decided views as to the inspiration and integrity of Scripture. His son says of him that he held "tenaciously to the Bible as the inspired Word of God" and preached "the doctrines with Calvinistic fervor."¹ Mr. Moody himself said:

"I believe that there are a good many scholars in these days, as there were when Paul lived, 'who professing themselves to be wise, have become fools'; but I don't think they are those who hold to the inspiration of the Bible. I have said that ministers of the Gospel who are cutting up the Bible in this way, denying Moses today and Isaiah tomorrow, and Daniel the next day and Jonah the next, are doing great injury to the Church."²

And even Calvinism is surpassed for rigidity of belief in the words of two defenders of scriptural inerrancy who have been quoted recently in a book on the controversial elements in religion today. One of them believes that since God is the author of the Bible, "common sense certainly assures us that every matter it contains, as originally written, is certainly as infallible as its author - whether on matters concerning science or any other." The other believes "that the Bible is as unerringly accurate in every statement that

¹Moody: Life of Dwight L. Moody, p. 496.

²Ibid., p. 495.

touches upon what we call science, in such realms as geology, or astronomy, or human or animal origins, as it is in the realm of spiritual truth and the way of salvation for lost men."¹

Much of the theological education in the United States has been based upon a Calvinistic idea of Scripture. Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey has been especially noted for this. Even under the new plan, which is supposed to be an advance toward a more liberal attitude, the Directors and Trustees are required to sign the following statement of faith:

"Believing the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; sincerely receiving and adopting the Confession of Faith of the Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures....I solemnly declare and promise....to endeavor to carry into effect all the articles and provisions of said plan."²

Dr. Patton, a former president of the Seminary, is assured that "we are logically forced to choose between a naturalistic and a supernaturalistic explanation of the Bible. And if we wish to keep the Christianity which teaches salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, we are shut up to a doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible."³ He also holds,

¹Barnes: Twilight of Christianity.

²Princeton Seminary Bulletin, November, 1929.

³Patton: Fundamental Christianity, p.172.

with Calvin, that the trustworthiness of the Bible is made known to us "by the witness of the Spirit."¹ Dr. Warfield, a late professor of the same institution, could only be satisfied with a Bible which was "the very Word of God itself, spoken by God Himself through human lips and pens."²

A conservative religious journal, published in New York City, recently carried an article in which the reader is reminded that "the Bible was not written to gratify human curiosity. We are not to try to sound the depths of the silence of God's Word....Let us be content with what has been revealed."³ Such a statement is very nearly a direct quotation of some of Calvin's words on the sufficiency of Scripture.

The Confession of Faith of the World's Christian Fundamentals Association, an organization having its headquarters in Minneapolis, Minnesota, has this to say concerning Scripture:

"We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as verbally inspired of God, and inerrant in the original writings, and that they are of supreme and final authority in faith and life."⁴

¹Patton: Fundamental Christianity, p. 161.

²Warfield: Revelation and Inspiration, p. 71.

³Watchman-Examiner, October 24, 1929.

⁴Christian Fundamentalist, April, 1928.

Finally, a word must be said pertaining to Calvin's influence upon Hymnology. The section in almost any hymn-book dealing with the subject of Scripture, will be seen to have hymns which express in striking terms Calvin's view of Holy Scripture. A hymn by W. W. Howe, 1867, refers to the Bible as "the heaven-drawn picture of Christ, the Living Word."¹ Another, by Anne Steele, 1760, speaks of Scripture as "these heavenly pages" and follows with:

"Divine Instructor, gracious Lord,
Be Thou forever near;
Teach me to love Thy sacred word,
And view my Saviour there."²

One of William Cowper's hymns mentions the glory which "gilds the sacred page" and assures the singer that "The hand that gave it (the Bible) still supplies....His truth", etc.³ The illumination of the Holy Spirit is clearly referred to in a hymn by Bernard Barton, 1836:

"Yet to unfold thy (the Bible's) hidden worth,
Thy mysteries to reveal,
That Spirit which first gave thee forth,
Thy volume must unseal."⁴

Another by Charles Wesley carries the same idea:

¹Dawson: The American Hymnal.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

"Come Holy Ghost, for moved by Thee
The prophets wrote and spoke;
Unlock the truth, Thyself the key,
Unseal the sacred book."¹

A hymn by Isaac Watts refers to the revelation of God in nature, "But when our eyes behold Thy word, we read Thy name in fairer lines," and Scripture is mentioned as "the blest volume Thou didst write."²

The thinking of Calvin with regard to Scripture is inextricably linked with religious thought, preaching, literature, and even government, from his day down to our very own. He left his impress not only upon the generation which followed his own, but upon the centuries which have passed since the great reformer of Geneva finished his earthly labors.

¹Dawson: The American Hymnal.

²Littlefield: Hymns of the Christian Life.

Chapter XIX

CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE AND MODERN BIBLICAL CRITICISM

The critical attitude toward the Scriptures is by no means a modern thing. The word 'modern' is used in the heading of this chapter chiefly for the reason that it is generally supposed that what is frequently called "modernism" is a movement of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such a belief is wide of the truth. Outcroppings of doubt concerning the divinity of Christ, the reality of miracles, and the trustworthiness of the Scriptures may be noted in church history for centuries back. No effort is being made here to identify a lapse of faith with biblical criticism, but it is unquestionably true that the two things are interrelated in the minds of many and it will be shown in this chapter that such was Calvin's attitude in the main.

Those who think that Calvin was never subjected to critical ideas and suggestions with regard to Scripture have only to read some of his replies to the critics of his day to see wherein they are in error. For instance, we may note the following:

"Thus we see at this day, that godless men not only in words reject both the Law and the Prophets, but also search out pretences, that they may appear to be doing right in destroying all faith in the oracles of God. For instance, they seek out all sorts of contradiction in Scripture, everything not well received, everything different from the common opinion, — all these absurdities as they call them, they collect together, and then they draw this conclusion, that all those are fools, who submit to any religion, since the word of God, as they say, contains so many absurd things....The Prophet by saying that 'right are the ways of Jehovah,' means that how much soever the ungodly may clamour, or murmur, or taunt, nothing is yet done by the Lord but what is right, and free from every blame and defect."¹

Three men who lived in Calvin's time have been given credit for the origination of the critical attitude which has now grown to such large proportions. There are some who point to Erasmus as the father of "that philosophical criticism of the Bible that, after so hard a battle, has at last done so much to free Christendom from the bondage of superstition and of the letter!"² It is well known that Erasmus greatly preferred the New Testament to the Old, that he considered many of the truths of the Old Testament to be covered up by "apparently indecent and silly fables", and that he did not

¹Commentary on Minor Prophets, Vol.I, p.506.

²Preserved Smith: Erasmus, p.159.

hesitate to question the Genesis account of creation, the account of the Flood, and the narratives concerning Samson.

Another has said that "Protestant Bible criticism had its originator in Luther, only that his successors shrank from persevering in his footsteps." (Adolf Hausrath: Luthers Leben, 2, p.145f.)¹ Mention has been made in a previous chapter to Luther's words concerning such books as Esther and James.

And finally, there are some who point to Castellio as a forerunner in this field. He denied the inspiration of the Song of Solomon, holding it to be a lascivious production in which Solomon described his wanton love. He also objected to the phrase in the Apostles' Creed - "He descended into Hell."

Many have asked, "What would be Calvin's attitude to biblical criticism were he living today?" The answers to this question have been many and varied. One author has written a book setting forth the idea that if Calvin were alive today he would be in the front rank among the devotees of Higher Criticism. Another is convinced that "if Calvin had lived in the nineteenth century....his clear and vigorous intellect would have preserved him from falling into this

¹Grisar: Luther, Vol.V, p.521.

error of attributing universal infallibility to every word contained in the Bible."¹ On the other hand, we have been assured by a representative of the present-day Calvinistic School that "We believe that John Calvin, by the grace of God, if he were to appear on earth again in the blaze of the nineteenth century civilization would honor the Word of God as much as ever."² Judging Calvin from past performance, one is inclined to believe that the latter author is right. It is reasonable to believe that Calvin would do today what he did in his own day, since he had to face many of the problems which confront modern students today. The following citation is rather convincing:

"How can prophecy, which is given by the Holy Spirit, be judged by men, so that the Spirit Himself is not judged by them? In this manner, even the word of God, which is revealed by the Spirit, will be subjected to examination. The unseemliness of this need not be pointed out."³

It is not unthinkable that Calvin was conscious of some of the conclusions which many have now reached through biblical criticism, and that he found such conclusions revolting, and, in his own mind, spiritually deadening. One recent author who makes no pretensions to religion believes that

¹Guizot: St. Louis and Calvin, p.188.

²Johnson: John Calvin and the Genevan Reformation, pp.8,9.

³Commentary on Corinthians, Vol. I, p.464.

modern criticism has "stripped the Scriptures of their authority to command men's confidence and to compel their obedience."¹ Such methods lead him and others to conclude that the God of the Old Testament is one whose "cruelty is notorious and his capriciousness is that of an Oriental despot."² He believes that, through modern criticism "the Bible thus becomes no more than a revered collection of hypotheses which each man may reject or accept in the light of his own knowledge."³ Such a statement would receive a challenge from many sources but it is the unmistakable conviction of vast numbers, and, as Calvin mused upon the outcome of the criticism of his own day, he no doubt reached the same conclusion.

It is certain that such a question as the authorship of the Pentateuch had arisen in Calvin's time. He tells us:

"I am aware of what is muttered in corners by certain miscreants, when they would display their acuteness in assailing divine truth. They ask, how do we know that Moses and the prophets wrote the books which now bear their names? Nay, they even dare to question whether there ever was a Moses. Were anyone to question whether there ever was a Plato, or an Aristotle, or a Cicero, would not the rod or the whip be deemed the fit chastisement of such folly?"⁴

¹Lippmann: A Preface To Morals, p.48.

²Ibid., p.214.

³Ibid., p. 47.

⁴Institutes, I.viii.9.

These doubts, however, did not deter Calvin from attributing the Pentateuch to Moses,¹ nor most of the Psalms to David.² Calvin also had to face the question of whether or not the text of Scripture as we now have it is corrupt. Answering those who asserted that our Scriptures cannot be pure since Antiochus, in the time of the Maccabees, ordered all the books of Scripture to be burned, Calvin wrote:

"But not to spend labor in vain in refuting these vile calumnies; let us rather attend to the care which the Lord took to preserve His Word."³

Then he tells of how the Lord inspired His "pious priests and others with such constancy that they hesitated not" to protect and transmit this precious treasure to posterity. He firmly believed that God employed the Jews "to preserve the doctrine of salvation contained in the Law and the Prophets, that Christ might manifest it in its own time."⁴ He says further that "The law of Moses has been wonderfully preserved, more by divine providence than by human care."⁵ He was confident that the same God who took such precautions in giving His Word to His people would take equal precaution in preserving its integrity and purity.

¹Institutes, I.xi.8; I.xiii.7; I.xv.3; I.xvii.2.

²Ibid., I.xviii.3.

³Ibid., I.viii.10.

⁴Ibid.,

⁵Ibid., I.viii.9.

Nor did the miracles of Scripture give Calvin any trouble. Instead of being a starting point for a critical analysis of the Bible, for Calvin, a miracle was a starting point for adoration, worship, and praise of the One who performed such wonders. In his treatment of Jonah's experience with the whale, he does not try to reduce the story to its most credible proportions, but takes particular delight in magnifying its miraculous elements. The more miraculous it was, the more cause he had for attributing greatness and sovereignty to God:

"The deliverance of Jonah is here in a few words described; but how attentively ought we to consider the event? It was an incredible miracle, that Jonah should have continued alive and safe in the bowels of the fish for three days. For how was it that he was not a thousand times smothered or drowned by waters? We know that fish continually draw in water: Jonah could not certainly respire while in the fish; and the life of man without breathing can hardly continue for a minute. Jonah, then, must have been preserved beyond the power of nature... Hence we learn that nothing is hard to God....let this history of Jonah come to our minds."¹

Calvin was willing to take Scripture as he found it and receive it unreservedly. He would have been in hearty

¹Commentary on Minor Prophets, Vol. III, pp.90,91.

agreement with the statement made by a recent author that "It is a strange idea that the historical truth of the Bible depends upon corroboration from heathen sources."¹

Modern biblical criticism has urged that certain difficulties stand in the way of receiving, unreservedly, the Scriptures as we have them. These difficulties have been set forth as follows: First, the general insecurity of oral tradition; second, the tendency to admit what is mythical into the history of a hero, especially of Christ; third, the likelihood or possibility that the witness should allow his own opinions to color his statements; and finally, the writers of the Synoptic Gospels not infrequently disagree.² Calvin would see no difficulties in the first three suggestions because he allowed for no human element in Scripture. His theory of dictation, inerrancy, and God's complete control over the minds and tongues of His "amanuenses" would eliminate any such dangers as those mentioned above. Sanday has rightly said that "The only question between the very strictest form of the traditional theory (of inspiration) and that which has been put forward" by himself and others, "is the extent of the human element."³ Calvin's theory of

¹Mitchell: The Historical Truth of the Bible, p.67.

²Dods: The Bible, Its Origin and Nature, p. 181.

³Sanday: Inspiration, (Bampton Lectures, 1893,) p.423.

inspiration makes biblical criticism, in some of its aspects, needless and even deplorable. As for the fourth difficulty mentioned above, Calvin would explain such a difficulty on the ground of copyists' errors but would never admit any discrepancy in the original documents. This he could well do since there are no original manuscripts extant. In a word, the very spirit of Calvinism is opposed to any type of investigation which presupposes error and the mistakes of human weakness. The two systems function on two entirely different bases. They are strikingly incompatible.

However, there are certain functions of biblical criticism which Calvin, himself, participated in. But of course such functions were those which left intact the essential unity and consistency of Scripture, its divine origin and content, and its freedom from error. For example, he showed some interest in the authorship of certain books. Concerning the book of Hebrews he has this to say:

"Moreover, as to its author, we need not be very solicitous....I, indeed, can adduce no reason to show that Paul was its author....But the manner of teaching, and the style, sufficiently shew that Paul was not the author."¹

Calvin's treatment of II Peter is also well known. While he

¹Commentary on Hebrews, pp. xxvi, xxvii.

had no objection to discussing and ascertaining, if possible, the authorship of scriptural books, it was really not a matter of vital concern to him because his position was essentially this: Regardless of who penned the book, God wrote it; the inspired writer dared not insert any words of his own. Too, the witness of the Holy Spirit authenticated the completed product and further attestation seemed unnecessary and even irreverent.

Calvin also participated in a certain amount of textual criticism, always on the assumption that copyists and not the original writers might be at fault. On Hebrews ix.1, he says:

"Some copies read 'πρώτη σκηνή', the 'first tabernacle'; but I suspect that there is a mistake as to the word 'tabernacle'; nor do I doubt but that some unlearned reader, not finding a noun to the adjective, and in his ignorance applying to the tabernacle what had been said of the covenant, unwisely added the word 'σκηνή', 'tabernacle.'"¹

We have seen, also, in a previous chapter how he deals with the omission of the three kings in the genealogy of Christ as recorded in the first chapter of Matthew; the name of Jeremiah in Matthew xxvii.9; and the problem of the name of Abraham in Acts vii.16.

Nor was Calvin wedded to the letter of Scripture,

¹Commentary on Hebrews, on chapter ix.1.

though he is not always consistent in this regard. In the chapter on Accommodation we have seen how he rebels against the literal interpretation of certain passages, viz., the appearance of Satan before God as recorded in Job ii; the treatment of idols in various passages of Scripture; and the seemingly erroneous conception of the size of the heavenly bodies in Psalm cxxxvi.7. He also has the following to say with regard to a too literal interpretation of the passages of Scripture dealing with the Supper:

"The letter of the words of the Supper ought not to be pertinaciously retained, since, in most of the passages of Scripture, great absurdity would follow from pressing the precise terms....It is certain, that were the Scripture pressed so violently as they (the Papists) insist, almost as many absurdities would spring up as it contains verses. God will be a man of war; He will repent; He will come down from heaven to know the deeds of men; He will desire revenge; He will at one time be carried away with anger, at another He will smile appeased; at one time He will sleep, at another He will rise, as if awakened from a debauch; at one time He will turn away His eyes, at another He will remember."¹

One is able to read only a little way into any of Calvin's works before he finds Calvin guilty of just this weakness, and yet perhaps the above quotation gives us his ideal.

¹Tracts, Vol. II, p. 433.

Mortal man seldom lives up to the best that he knows.

Calvin certainly did not believe that the Scriptures were supposed to teach science. Although some of his writings would lead us to believe otherwise, he deliberately gives his opinion that God speaks in Scripture in the language of appearances, and says that "the Holy Spirit had no intention to teach astronomy."¹ The message of God's Word to Calvin was primarily the message of redemption, and all references to heavenly bodies, and the like, were incidental and unimportant. Therefore God might well use popular language without in any way opening an avenue for the accusation of error.

Dean Farrar thinks that we have an anticipation of modern criticism in Calvin's views about the Messianic prophecies. This view is based on the fact that Calvin considered the words of the psalmists and prophets to be applicable primarily to the events and circumstances of their own days. And because of this, Dean Farrar believes that Calvin interprets the Evangelists' and Apostles' use of these prophecies only "as illustrative references; as skillful adaptations; as admissible transferences; as metaphoric allusions; as fair accommodations; as pious deflections."² Such a view is hardly fair to Calvin. It

¹Commentary on Psalm cxxxvi.7.

²Farrar: History of Interpretation, p.347.

is very true that the reformer had a dislike for allegories, metaphors, types, etc., and that he did apply the prophecies of the Old Testament writers primarily to the events of their own time, but in and through it all he saw the promise of the Messiah who should come to redeem His people. Calvin saw Christ in all the Bible; the whole of it is interpreted in the light of Christ; and it is impossible to construe his idea of the Evangelists' use of prophecy as mere "admissible transferences" or "skillful adaptations."

And so, in the light of Calvin's words with regard to critical tendencies in his own day and of his treatment of men like Castellio and Servetus, we are justified in believing that Calvin would hardly take his stand among the modern biblical critics, were he living today, even if we take for granted that his own mild critical tendencies should be more highly developed. He would have especial difficulty with the type of criticism known as the Historical, and the modern insistence upon the human element would be directly opposed to his whole doctrine of Scripture. But regardless of what Calvin would do in the twentieth century, the fact remains that his doctrine of Scripture as we have it leaves no place for the insertion of the critical methods and assumptions which are typical of our day.

PART IV

CRITICISM OF CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

Chapter XX

CRITICISM OF CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

The value of any criticism of Calvin's Doctrine of Holy Scripture will largely depend upon the critic's ability at orientation. Such a critic will find it necessary to acquaint himself with the political, economic, and ecclesiastical history of the day in which Calvin lived. Any failure to understand the theological trends of those times will make it practically impossible to arrive at any worthy appraisal of Calvin's contribution to theological thought. It is impossible to separate a man from his motives and his message, and one must remember that even Calvin - strong and stalwart as he was - was nevertheless influenced by forces over which he had no control and of which he was unconscious.

And to this understanding and appreciation of the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere in which Calvin worked must be added true sympathy. The failure to possess a sympathetic attitude will blind one's eyes to much that is of real significance in the Reformer's life and work. For instance, the critic must not forget the crisis which faced Protestant leaders during the days following the break with Rome - a crisis which has been previously referred to. If, at times, Calvin appears to be guilty of bibliolatry, one must not forget that the cry of the masses at that time was for something tangible to which

they could look with confidence - to which they could anchor their faith. Since the word of the Pope and the Roman Church had been discredited, no word of man was of any value whatever. The assurance that the Bible was God's own word was the only message to which these people would listen and the only means whereby their weakening faith might be strengthened and saved. If one becomes weary at Calvin's continual and persistent appeal to and praise of Scripture, then one must remember ~~that~~ only to the extent to which Scripture was revered among the masses could religious truth be disseminated among them, and only to the extent which Calvin could base his teaching upon God's Word would his message be heard. It was not enough that he should believe in the divine origin of the Book; the rescue of souls depended upon a constant and vigorous proclamation of this belief.

Nor must any consideration of Calvin's Doctrine of Scripture be divorced from his sincere devotion to God's cause in the world. It is well enough to urge the scientific attitude in the pursuit of all truth, but if by scientific attitude one means a disinterested attitude, then such an attitude could never find lodgment in Calvin's breast. It was impossible for him to examine the Scriptures as a biologist would examine various forms of life or a physicist examine the laws that ^{govern} the universe. In this precious Volume he saw the way of life for all men, and hearing the cry of those who had lost the way, he pointed

them to the Bible and its message of redeeming love. Perhaps if the need for spiritual assurance had not been so urgent, he would have exemplified more of the scientist approach to the truth, but the very exigency of the hour required demonstration and proclamation rather than observation. When he examined the Scriptures, he examined them as a Christian. When he contemplated the life of Christ, he contemplated the life of his Lord and Master - like Paul, he was Christ's "bond-servant", and proud of it. He could not and would not remove himself from Christian influences and associations long enough to look at spiritual truth from a cold, matter-of-fact point of view. If he appears to be prejudiced, one must remember that this prejudice was born of a keen concern for the cause of Him to whom he had committed his all.

Finally, Calvin's Doctrine of Holy Scripture must not be thought of as a product of superstition. One would think from many of the statements made about Calvin that he was a classic example of the superstitious people of the middle ages. On the contrary, we have in him one who possessed a rare logical mind. Church historians have vied with one another in bearing witness to his strictly logical system of doctrine. Once Calvin's major premises are granted, his conclusions are inevitable. His doctrines were determined by the evidence of which he believed himself to be possessed. One of Luther's biographers calls Calvin the "greatest scientific force

of early Protestantism". He says ¹ further that Calvin has a faculty for "mastering, systematically organizing and condensing into brief formulas the prodigious wealth of fertile ideas which poured in upon him unbidden from all sides while he was at work and even when engaged merely in light conversation". He ¹ was confident that superstition could be avoided only by giving proper respect and reverence to Holy Scripture. "And the fruits", said he, "which uniformly proceed from the contempt of the law are, that men who choose rather to follow their own understanding than to submit to the authority of God, become wedded to gross superstition". ² One can readily see that he has the Roman Church in mind here, and that communion was a constant warning to him in this regard. Calvin and his followers had, through experience, discovered in Scripture a living thing, Its teachings were not theoretical but practical; and there is no account on record of a Calvinist useing the Scripture in the superstitious ways which many have used it, such as for telling fortunes, as an almanac, as a sacred object with healing powers, etc. The Book was never worshipped as many have alleged but was honored as a message from the Most High.

In general, the writer finds himself in agreement with the Doctrine of Scripture held by Calvin, but in

1 Bohmer: Luther in the Light of Recent Research, p.184

2 Commentary on Psalm lxxviii, 58.

matters of detail he must disagree. The seriousness and reverence which so characterized the Reformer in his study of the problem of Scripture must be admired by all who study his work. There was no ruthless spirit about his analysis of the Bible, and even where one disagrees with his findings, he must respect Calvin for his deep earnestness and sincerity. He was wholly devoid of the iconoclastic attitude which characterizes too many of our modern biblical critics. One would be far more inclined to listen sympathetically to the findings of modern biblical criticism if the critics were more sympathetic with those who find in the Bible more than a mere collection of religious literature.

(a) REVELATION.

Calvin's God-consciousness is a trait of character which deserves to be emulated by all people everywhere. This was the underlying principle upon which all that he thought and did was based. God's presence in the world was a matter of which Calvin was assured. He heard His voice in the roll of thunder; he saw His smile in the wonderful rainbow; he beheld His beauty in the starlit heavens, the glorious sunset, the blossoming flowers, and the song of the birds; to him the whole earth was athrob with God. Scripture had no meaning aside from the fact of God.

Now the writer quite agrees with Calvin that this consciousness of God is due to a self-revelation on God's part. Man did not discover God accidentally nor did he

go in search of God on his initiative. We quite agree with Prof. H. R. Mackintosh that "Christ is proof that in religion, right on from its lowest stages, man has not been stretching out his hands into a universe empty, blind and deaf. Rather at every point he has been responding to the touch of a God who creates the higher longing, and in anticipating love stirs our prayer"¹. The emphasis is some quarters upon investigation as opposed to revelation has gained little ground. There are some who hold to the idea that man is continually groping in the darkness, forcing his way, little by little, into the light of truth. They would present God as passive and man as active. Such an attitude has no basis of fact in experience and by its very nature denies the initial urge which gives man his start in his quest for God. The very fact that man responds to God signifies that he have found Him, because it is only after He has stirred our hearts and consciences that we go forth to know Him more fully.

We also agree with Calvin that God not only makes Himself known in revelation but imparts to man His divine will. However, we must part company with the Reformer when he confuses revelation with the record of revelation. Instead of Holy Scripture being the sum total of all that God as made known to man - as Calvin believed - it is

1 H. R. Mackintosh: The Christian Apprehension of God, p.35

rather the record of the experiences by which men received and shared revealed truth from God. Such a view naturally allows for the inference that men did not always receive all that God revealed nor did they understand perfectly all that they did receive. Since man is imperfect, and man is the medium by which revelation is received from God and transmitted to men, then it immediately follows that the result of such experiences of revelation may be faulty. When one reads in the new Testament that "God is love", and then turns to the Old Testament and finds God commanding His servants: "Go ye after him through the city, and smite; let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women;"¹ one is forced to believe that revelation cannot be on the same plane in these two places. In the Old Testament case the writer is "seeing through a glass darkly", but in the New Testament case he is seeing "face to face". God is the same in both instances but the ability of the two writers is by no means the same. One is seeing God in the bright light of the life of Christ, while the other is inclined to attribute to God attitudes and weaknesses of men who are yet ignorant of the "life that was the light of men".

(b) INSPIRATION.

¹ Ezekial 9:5,6.

Inspiration, for Calvin, covered all the processes by which revelation was put into writing-remembering, of course, that revelation and Scripture were practically synonymous terms to him. While we agree with him that the Bible is uniquely inspired, we must disagree with him as to God's method of inspiration. It was exceedingly unfortunate that he adopted the dictation theory of inspiration. Such a theory placed the human writer in a state which was less than conscious. He was supposed to have been perfectly passive, merely an agent or instrument in God's hands. It was not a process which called for the best that a man possessed but carried with it a demand that he divest himself of his personality, mind, and feelings, and simply record what God spoke. A piece of machinery might have done just as well. In fact, the dictaphone today is a perfect example of the inspired writer which Calvin pictures to us. The dictation theory made it wholly unnecessary that the men of best mentality and greatest ability be chosen for the task of receiving the Lord's message. Under such a theory it seems strange that God should have selected such outstanding men as Luke or Paul to undertake such a task. It seemed poor economy to use the time of such gifted men for this task, when any second-rate man might have done just as well. The qualifications for such an undertaking were not ability and initiative but merely that one should be willing to lose his identity for a space of time while God used him

as an amanuensis. The very fact that various authors of the Bible were such unusual men presents an argument against dictation which cannot be easily answered. It is certain that the Scriptures make no claim to being dictated. There are instances in which certain statements are set forth as being direct words of God but no part of the Bible makes such a claim for the whole of it. Nor has there ever been the need for such a book. Any thought of dictation is certainly contrary to all our conceptions of the way God does things. Throughout the ages He has been sharing His work with men, even permitting them to make mistakes, but always with the thought that they will be better workmen as they are taught by experience — some of it severe experience. God shared with Moses the task of leading His children out of bondage in Egypt; He shared with Nehemiah, Ezra, and others, the task of restoration after the captivity; He has always shared with men the glorious task of proclaiming the gospel to lost men. What happier thought is ours than that we are "workers together with God"?

And yet our partnership with God in great enterprises never precludes the possibility of error on our part. Such a thought makes Calvin's idea of dictation seem rather misplaced. Surely God's key men among the Israelites were media for revealing His truth and yet not one of them was perfect. A life should influence men far more than a book, and if God did not control these lives

so that they could not err, we have no reason to believe that He so controlled those who penned our Scriptures that they could write only the exact words He had spoken.

It seems never to have occurred to Calvin that he was doing the cause of God more harm than good by such a theory. He himself ran across great difficulties with this theory, and only by strangely concocted minor theories was he able to make his dictation theory seem plausible to himself. He might have known that though men should accept his major theories, they would never go to the extremes to which he went in propping them up. It really seemed that he expected men to take his word as they formerly had taken the word of the pope or some other ecclesiastical authority. His insistence that God even selected the particular Hebrew words used in Scripture; that He fashioned the literary style in which the Book was written; and that even the order of the books in the two Testaments was ordained of Him - all these things merely paved the way for serious difficulty in the future.

It also appears that Calvin was more anxious about the integrity of the Book than he was about the integrity of God. He was willing to run all the risks of having men think peculiar thoughts about God if by doing so he could continue to convince them that each word in Scripture had been dictated. Certain commands of the Almighty might show Him up in a strange light, but then, reasoned Calvin, the theory must be kept intact. Such reasoning was destined

to bring about all sorts of trouble in later years, and it did. We are not suprised that men found certain Calvinistic conceptions of God revolting and we can feel some sympathy for one who said in later years to an ardent Calvinist, "Your God is my devil". We believe that Calvin's intentions were good, but that does not alter the fact that his position wrought much spiritual havoc.

(c) SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY.

Calvin's view as to the supreme authority of Scripture naturally followed upon his theory of inspiration. He had so identified God with the Bible that the latter had become a sacred thing. If there was such a thing as dēvine authority, then there could be no question about scriptural authority, for, as we have seen, Scripture was nothing more nor less than the divine will put in writing. One cannot help but believe that papal authority exerted quite an influence upon Calvin's position here. All the people of his day, and even Calvin himself, had been reared in an atmosphere of authority, external authority. It was a part of the psychology of the times. No one would dare set forth any set of doctrines or take part in any sort of movement which did not have behind it an authority strong enough to enforce attention. The feudal system, relationship between servant and master, certain forms of slavery, ideas of local and national government, and current doctrines of the Church - all conspired to create a feeling that authority was the saving salt in any enterprise.

We are strongly opposed to any such tendency in religion, but we must not think that Calvin was the originator or sole exponent of such a tendency. He was merely a man of his time and was compelled, to some extent, to humor the prevailing attitudes of the people to whom he ministered. Perhaps the good that he did would never have been accomplished had he ignored these popular tendencies and adopted policies with which the people would have been wholly out of sympathy and in which there was for them no appeal whatever.

However, we must not conclude that the Bible held for Protestants exactly the same place which the Church held for the Papists. Charges of this nature have been hurled against Protestants from Calvin's day even until now. The subservience of the Papists to the authority of the Church was a blind subservience. They believed in the Church whether they knew or understood what she taught or not. They were not permitted to inquire into the reason for any doctrine or to ask to know the foundation upon which it rested. Implicit adherence to all that the Church proposed was strictly enforced among her constituency. On the other hand, the reformers did not stop with the affirmation of the Bible's authority but sought to teach all of their followers the meaning and the message of the Bible. Calvin never asked any man to take his word for anything but with each contention would refer to a passage of Scripture which he considered to be proof of his

conviction. We have two very different principles at work here. In one we have blind and ignorant obedience; in the other we have an obedience which is urged on the ground of knowledge of what God is supposed to have said and decreed. We hold no brief for either sort of authority but we must recognize a tremendous difference here in the respective positions of the Protestants and Papists.

Calvin's insistence upon the absolute authority of every word of Scripture opened the door to grave danger for the Church. A man is always shouldering a tremendous responsibility when he undertakes to speak for God, and Calvin insisted that scriptural authority rested upon the divine origin of every word of the Bible. In doing so he took it upon himself to declare God the author of all Scriptural ideas, conceptions, and commands. This was dangerous because it made God responsible for all the assertions, prejudices, and narrow opinions of many misinformed men who speak to us from the pages of Scripture. To hold over men's heads the club of authority and to urge them therefore to go forth in the world to carry out all the commands of Scripture, was to put in operation a principle which would prove disastrous to the most intelligent expression of the Christian religion. It was this very principle that later brought about the disgraceful persecution of so-called "witches" in England and the United States in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Since

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" was a scriptural decree, then religious leaders thereby had divine authority for kindling the fires beneath those suspected of being guilty of witchcraft.

There was, too, always a danger from misinterpretation. No one could possibly say with assurance that he was giving the correct meaning of every passage of Scripture. Ever-increasing knowledge of the languages in which the Scriptures were originally written, archeological discoveries, adoption of new and more accurate critical methods, and a fuller conformity to the mind of Christ, would naturally throw a brighter light upon the meaning of Scripture. Yet Calvin was willing for his own interpretation of the Bible to go forth among men carrying with it the direct and final sanction of God. And those who hesitated to rally immediately to such leadership were branded as heretics, infidels and pagans.

This insistence upon authority also proved to be the root of another of his gravest mistakes/coersion. As was pointed out in an earlier chapter of this thesis, Calvin considered any disobedience of the expressed commands of Scripture blasphemy. It was not uncommon for him to lose his patience, cast forbearance to the winds, and declare in no uncertain terms that it was the p^rerogative of the elect to compel obedience to the divine authority of Scripture. Holding to such an attitude he could hardly boast of rising above the tactics of the Romanists. It is just this sort of spirit that has soiled the banner of

Protestantism in ages past. We can throw neither the first nor the last stone at the Papists since we are not without sin in this very serious matter. We cannot help but wish that if Calvin had felt it necessary to declare the Scriptures authoritative, that he had stopped there and not gone further, even to the point of trying to enforce this authority. The cause of Christ was by no means helped but on the contrary greatly hindered by such policies.

Now we are in perfect accord with Calvin in declaring that the Bible has authority, but we have in mind a very different sort of authority from that which Calvin insisted upon. We believe that the Bible has that sort of authority which is always attendant upon truth. The words of Scripture aren't true because they are in the Bible, but they are in the Bible because they are true. And truth, verified by experience, demands recognition. A great surgeon speaks with authority on matters in his field because his surgical accomplishments merit consideration. A great scientist speaks with authority concerning matters in his field because his labors in the realm of science makes it fitting that he should so speak. This sort of authority comes not through the ipse dixit of some person or another, not by popular vote, not by resignation to such an existing order of things, but by virtue of the fact that experience has revealed such men worthy of confidence. And it is this sort of

authority which we gladly ascribe to the Bible. Down through the years it has been put to the test of Christian experience and to this very hour it inspires to higher living and nobler thinking. In countries where it has been set free it has revolutionized customs and habits of long standing. Compared with other literature it takes a place of prominence and honor in any library. The pick and spade in Bible lands continue to turn over evidences of the historicity of the book. Men have discovered that the only happy life accorded to man is the life lived in accordance with the principles set forth in Holy Writ. Where-ever read it leaves a rich deposit of spiritual truth and men rise higher in proportion to the extent of their knowledge of Scripture and of Him whose matchless life is delineated by Scripture. This sort of authority will bear the test of time and will merit admiration of intelligent men.

(d) WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

In approaching this phase of Calvin's doctrine of Holy Scripture, we again find ourselves in part with Calvin and in part opposed to him. It is certain that no argument is needed to convince the Christian that the Holy Spirit of God is the "Spirit of truth" or that He will lead us "into all truth". But we must protest when we are told by Calvin that the Holy Spirit convinces us that every word in Holy Scripture is verbally inspired by God. We believe that God's Spirit teaches us to distinguish between

that in Scripture which is undoubtedly the deliverances of men and that which is a direct word from God. Surely it was the Holy Spirit who assured us that the words in the New Testament, "God is love", and the words in the Old Testament, "slay utterly old and young", came from two utterly different sources. In other words, it is our conviction that what the witness of the Holy Spirit means to the Christian is not a blanket approval of all the words contained in our Bible, but rather the building up within us of a Christian consciousness enabling us to discriminate between that which is and that which is not of divine origin.

And it is our belief that when the Word became flesh, this living Word become the touch-stone by which all of Scripture must be tested. Being Himself the fullest revelation man had yet had of God, nothing contrary to His Spirit could possibly be of God. When we hear Him say, "You have heard how that they said of old time ...but I say unto you", we know we are listening to one who speaks with authority "and not as the scribes". And this authority is the authority of truth - truth that has been tried and tested down through the centuries and has not been found wanting. "I am the truth" is a declaration which has behind it all the evidence which the most exacting mind could possibly require, and therefore we do not hesitate to insist that all other deliverances, whether in Scripture or out of it, be required to stand or fall by this norm of all truth.

We are also sorry that Calvin minimized the place of reason in religious experience. In some instances he even made it appear that reason and the witness of the Spirit were antagonistic. And of course he admonished his readers to cast reason to the winds and rely solely upon the instructions of the Spirit. An attitude of this kind suggested that God worked in men's hearts but not in their heads, and truly such a suggestion is subversive of the truth. Perhaps this explains why Calvin was so unreasonable in many of his contentions, and it is quite plain that it would never have done for his theories to have been subjected to the laboratory of reason. When backed in a corner he would frequently condemn his opponent as one who was "presumptuous", a "caviller", and an "unbeliever". When Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free", it should have settled for all time the idea that men must close their eyes and accept any and all things handed them by those who set themselves up as theological authorities. This Christian freedom would come through knowledge, by the proper use of one's reasoning powers, and not ^{by} accepting verbatim every deliverance of religious leaders.

And then it is quite possible that Calvin mistook his own feelings in the matter for a universal message of God's Spirit. He was quite frank in saying that he believed every word of Scripture to be God-breathed because

the Holy Spirit assured him of this. Now if the Holy Spirit did assure him of this, is it not strange that the Holy Spirit does not assure all men of this conviction, that is, all men who love the Lord as sincerely and seek His truth as genuinely as Calvin did? We are prone to believe that Calvin, unconsciously perhaps, was influenced to take this position by the very force of his own theory of inspiration. While giving reason a minor position in his system, he nevertheless reasoned that if God did speak every word of Scripture, He would surely impress this fact upon the consciences of those who read the Bible. And it is exceedingly easy for a man to feel that of which he is convinced he should feel. In short, we are afraid that Calvin was influenced in this doctrine more by feeling than by fact.

(e) INERRANCY

Calvin's belief in the inerrancy of the Scriptures is another unfortunate result of his view of inspiration. If every word of the Bible was received by dictation from God, it naturally followed that the Book was as free from error as its Author. To insinuate that error could be found in the Bible was to cast aspersions upon the wisdom and knowledge of God Himself.

One can readily see the difficulties which would immediately arise from such a contention as this. In holding to such a theory, surely Calvin forgot the purpose for which the Scriptures were written and ^{the} realm

of thought in which ~~they were~~ to hold a place of authority. It was never God's plan that the Bible should be a textbook on science and to force this new responsibility upon it was but to weaken its hold upon thinking men. Scientific knowledge was in its infancy at the time most of the Bible was written and it is unthinkable that all references to the natural world should be accurate. And yet Calvin was perfectly willing that the trustworthiness of the Scriptures should stand or fall upon their ability to speak unerringly upon matters in the realm of science. This is another example of the fact that many would-be friends of Holy Scripture sometimes prove themselves to be its worst enemies.

It was only natural that names, places, and dates should occasionally become confused and misplaced but Calvin saw no excuse for these things and would make no allowances for them. This resulted in it becoming necessary for him to resort to all sorts of schemes for smoothing over discrepancies in Scripture which were very apparent to all. This procedure added nothing to the usefulness of the Bible nor did it strengthen in any way the Protestant cause. It actually gave rise to much controversy in Calvin's own day and has frequently threatened to rend asunder the bit of unity which Protestants really possess.

While the infallibility of the pope is practically a modern thing in its official sense, it is well understood that it was fairly a working principle even at the time of

the Protestant Reformation. Therefore it seems that something of this mania for infallibility of ~~some~~ sort was more or less contagious in those days, and Calvin, along with his contemporaries, shared this state of mind. And so in place of an infallible pope whom they had set aside, they now put forth an infallible Bible, and one feels almost justified in saying that the substitute came very near causing as much trouble as the original principle. There had never been a place in the religion of Christ for either, and His cause in the earth has been hindered for centuries by both. It would seem that the papal claims would have been a warning to Calvin and that he would have avoided any semblance of this error, but such was not the case and the result was regrettable. The Church is not free of this handicap but we should be grateful that much progress has been made in this direction.

It is very evident that Calvin used his doctrine of scriptural inerrancy to bolster up his own arguments when he found himself in the midst of a controversy with one of his contemporaries. This made it possible for him to take an unfair advantage of his opponent because he could say to his opponent, "You are not opposing me, but opposing God. What you say may be incorrect because it is a product of your own mind; while what I say is based on Scripture and Scripture cannot err". We do not mean to insinuate that Calvin deliberately took

unfair advantages of his opponents but the result is just the same. It is well known that he did not hesitate to label them with rather uncomplimentary names, reasoning that their objections to his theological position was blasphemy against God and therefore worthy of the severest condemnation. Here, again, the Reformer failed to realize that truth can stand on its own feet and is never in need of being propped up by a theory. We feel that he should have been so convinced of the truth of his position that he should have been willing for it to have had no more external authority behind it than that which the position of his opponent possessed. Of course this appeal to an inerrant Book was a short cut to his ^{end} in view - it brought quicker results - but it is hardly the method of Christ and we cannot believe it had His approval. The method of letting truth prove itself worthy of recognition is a slower process but it is surer and far more permanent. Christ might have exerted His authority and forced every man of His generation into ^{the} Kingdom but he rejected that method, and now after nineteen hundred years He is still patiently waiting for His message to be accepted by all men. The secret of this patient waiting is two-fold: first, a genuine faith in the value of His message; and second, a genuine faith in the capacity of men to comprehend and accept this message of life. To resort to high pressure methods in an endeavor to get the world to accept your message is to infer that your message is not very convincing

and that such tactics are needful.

We must acknowledge, however, some sympathy with Calvin's position when we remember the circumstances under which he was laboring. Thousands upon thousands waited upon his deliverances and he naturally was conscious of a tremendous responsibility. If he should voice unworthy principles he would lead countless men and women astray. We can readily see that his one desire was that he might have an inerrant source of information upon which he might base all his doctrines. We are inclined to believe that he was conscientious in his conviction that in the Bible he had such a source. He was thoroughly convinced that the Papists had made their great mistake when they mixed tradition with Scripture and it was certain that most of their corruptions were traceable to the fact that they had ignored the express commands and precepts of Holy Scripture. He would guard his movements against such errors by adhering implicitly to the Book he believed to be infallible. This precaution, however, was not as successful as he might have wished.

(f) CONSISTENCY

Calvin boldly declared that God "can never swerve from what He has said", but he did not take the trouble to clear up the difficulties which immediately arise when such an assertion is made. It is very evident from a thorough study of Scripture that either God did not speak

all the words attributed to Him or else He does at times contradict Himself. Of course Calvin would never have admitted either of these things. His view of Scripture would have made it impossible for him to have accepted the first assumption, and his view of God would have caused him to reject the latter. And yet an unbiased examination of the Bible forces us to accept one of the assumptions. How could the same God demand in the Old Testament "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", and in the New Testament teach that "whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also"? Or how could the same God in the Old Testament inspire His children to seek vengeance on their enemies and in the New Testament declare that they should "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you"? Of course Calvin would have had some explanation for these things - an explanation satisfactory to himself but hardly acceptable by those who did not share his theory of inspiration. Very probably he would have said that these quotations merely seemed to be contradictory, whereas if we knew the proper interpretation, all things would be made plain to us and harmony would overcome discord. This was a principle to which he resorted more than once and on every occasion it weakened his position and made his leadership less forceful. If some things were just the opposite to what they appeared to be, then

where would this reasoning stop? How could one be assured of anything, and what doctrine could boast of being true?

We quite agree with the Reformer, however, that there is an underlying unity to the whole of Holy Scripture. All the writers are giving us an account of their experiences with God, and certain phases of these experiences are common to them all. Certain attributes of God are witnessed to by all of them and men were always lifted higher and higher in spiritual vision and in fuller appreciation of the divine will. The entire Book also traces the processes of God's redeeming love - His constancy, His mercy, His willingness to forgive and offer His children a new opportunity to show themselves worthy of His goodness. And it is also true that Christ is the key to the whole Book. The Old Testament promises His coming and prepares the way for Him, while the New Testament presents Him to us and makes His message plain. **U**nity and consistency we do find in Holy Scripture but not the narrow, legal sort about which Calvin seemed to have been most concerned. It is true that God never changes, but Scripture gives every evidence that your conception of Him grows and enlarges. Is not this as it should be?

(g) SCRIPTURES INDISPENSABLE.

We are in perfect agreement with Calvin that the Scriptures are indispensable. In the chapter dealing with this phase of his doctrine, we pointed out that Calvin gave seven reasons why the scriptures were indispensable.

(1) They are ^{the} norm for doctrine. This is partially true but must not be pressed too far. Many religious doctrines have been based upon passages of Scripture which expressed sentiments and ideas which are wholly contrary to the spirit of Christ. The witch-burning in England and America in the latter part of the seventeenth century was supported by the guilty parties on the ground that it was scriptural. Such gruesome doctrines as the lost condition of all unbaptized babes, the decree of God that some men be damned, and the execution of so-called heretics; all were substantiated by verses of Scripture. So we conclude that a doctrine is not a sound doctrine merely because it may have the backing of some passage from the Bible. The error arising from making this principle too general may be traced, as we have traced nearly all Calvin's errors, to his view of inspiration. To use Scripture as a norm for doctrine, one must do so in the light of progressive revelation, and in the light of the teachings and life of Christ.

(2) Norm for manner of life. Here, again, we

must beware lest we become too general in our statements. It is true that the very highest type of life known to men is found within the Holy Scripture, while on the other hand we have portrayed to us some of the worst characters in history. If a man is unintelligent in his use of the Bible, he might reach the conclusion that he is justified in imitating any character in the Scriptures; but certainly ^{not} this is/what we mean, or what Calvin meant, by setting up the Scriptures as a norm for one's manner of life. We believe Calvin had in mind the best characters, not all the characters in Holy Writ, and if our assumption is correct, we gladly concur in this phase of his argument.

(3) Source of our knowledge of God. We would not for a moment dispute this point. It is well to point out that God awakens within us the consciousness of His existence even before we see the Scriptures, but it is the Bible that tells us about this Presence of whose existence we are conscious. It makes known to us His characteristics, His nature, His purposes and plans, and His will for our lives. Of course it is Christ that reveals God to us most fully, but we must remember to what extent we are indebted to the Bible for our knowledge of Christ. If we only stop to think how vague our conception of God would be if we did not possess the Holy Scriptures, we would readily agree with Calvin that the Scriptures are indispensable. This Book has in truth been "a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our pathway" - even the pathway that leads to

God and to fullest knowledge concerning His Person. The spiritual darkness which exists in lands^{which} do not possess the Bible makes us more and more aware of the genuine worth of this Book.

(4) Foundation upon which our faith is built, One must be careful here lest he give the Bible a place of honor higher than that which he gives to Christ, for Christ is the one and only foundation of our faith. He is the norm by which we test all doctrines and principles. True it is that the Bible is the foundation of our faith if we have in mind that we are indebted to the Bible for our information concerning Christ. To the Christian mind, all things must stand or fall just to the extent to which they harmonize with His teaching and His life. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is¹ Jesus Christ". And as the hymn-writer has it:

"On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand".²

(5) Source of true religion. Here, as was pointed out in an earlier chapter, Calvin has in mind religious life and actions rather than faith and doctrines. It is very evident, too, that he has in mind here the unscriptural practices of the Roman Church. We are in hearty agreement that church polity should adhere to New Testament principles. The remarkable success of the early church warrants the adoption of her methods by succeeding generations. We

¹ Corinthians iii-11

² Edward Mote

deplore the divided condition of the Christian Church today and look forward to the coming of unity, but few of us realize to what extent unscriptural practices are responsible for this lack of unity. If we could agree to put aside tradition and man-made substitutions and read again our New Testaments with a determination to bring back, if possible, ^{the} democracy, and spiritual power of the early Christian Church, we would be startled to find that an united Christendom was closer than we had even dared to hope.

(6) Guide and Teacher. The Bible has been a most influential guide and teacher to the Christian. Many men, without outside aid, have come to a saving knowledge of Christ from reading the Holy Scriptures. Those who had lost the way to the Father's House and who were sadly ignorant of spiritual truth, found untold blessings awaiting them in God's Word. This phase of scriptural usefulness is absolutely indispensable and it is difficult to see how the Church could continue to make progress without it. This **Book** has answered the cry of many who were saying: "Lead me to the **Book** that is higher than I". Poor indeed the world would be, without the guiding and teaching service of the Scriptures.

(7) Mirror in which we see ourselves as we are. In this regard, too, the Bible has done us a service which we could not well have done without. Seeing ourselves in a true light, we resolved to live nobler lives, to think

loftier thoughts, and to perform more sacrificial deeds. The Bible was honest with us - did not hesitate to be frank - and we are better because of it.

(h) THEORY OF ACCOMMODATION

This theory was literally Calvin's "city of refuge" whenever he was confronted by some passage of Scripture which seemed to interfere with his doctrine of inspiration. It was indeed a sure-all for all his scriptural problems and one cannot but admire the dexterity with which he used it. Surely it took a master mind to make one theory cover so many difficulties.

We are confident that the theory of accommodation is another unnecessary strain on the credulity of Calvin's followers, and again we do not hesitate to put the blame on his idea of inspiration. Behind this wall of defense he had to crowd all incorrect statements as regards the size of the heavenly bodies, the anthropomorphic ideas of God, certain very evident omissions, and all the passages of a war-like nature which outraged even the sturdy feelings of the Reformer. He passed over the most obvious explanation of these things, viz., that men, because of their ignorance and frailty, could not grasp fully or accurately all that God was revealing, and constructed a theory which could not be accepted by thinking men. It is far more reasonable to believe that Scripture is man's report of a great experience with God, and in every case the worth of the report is in direct

proportion to the capacity of the recorder. The situation is similar to that of an audience listening to a rendition of Handel's Messiah. The impression which each hearer receives and the report which he makes to those who were not present will depend entirely upon the amount of musical appreciation which he possesses, the amount of musical training which he has had, and the degree to which he is able to impart to others the impression which he has received. If the hearer's description of the music is faulty, we are not to suppose that the rendition was second-rate, but we are to inquire into his ability to report on such a tremendous musical experience.

Going back to Calvin's reference to Scripture as a teacher, we are made to wonder at his willingness to let it appear that the Bible was imparting false ideas, erroneous conceptions, and making damaging commissions. The competent teacher will surely speak in a simple language, but he will also adhere always to the truth, believing that even though the pupil may not be able to receive it all now, that in time he can and will accept these things. It would be a strange instructor who would deliberately lead his pupils astray on the grounds merely that they were not capable now of receiving the truth.

Of course we sympathize with Calvin's endeavor to convince men that they ^{are} capable of understanding enough of Scripture to work out their own salvation without the intervention of priest or church. In this theory he is trying to break down the claim that only those in authori-

ty can read and interpret the Bible aright, and we heartily agree with him. But we must part company with him when he takes his theory to the extremes which we have mentioned above.

(i) SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

In this phase of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture we are continually reminded that he is combating the Papist practice of using extra-scriptural sources for many doctrines in the Roman Church. Calvin was positively correct in his contention that the corrupt state of the Church of Rome was largely due to its disregard of scriptural injunctions and its willingness to give tradition and man-made practices places of honor in its system. We are in perfect accord with him in believing that the Scriptures contain sufficient material upon which to base all our ordinances, doctrines, and practices. We are treading upon dangerous ground when we start out to inaugurate articles of faith and modes of worship which, if not contrary to, are certainly unknown to scriptural usage. There is no limit to such procedure and many of the purely fantastic customs of the Roman Church should be sufficient warning for us all.

We believe that Calvin is also right in his conviction that the Bible is sufficient for our spiritual needs. Our souls cry out for God, and this Book tells us about Him and makes known to us His attributes. We are conscious of sin, and the Scriptures point us to a forgiving

Father and a loving Savior. We hunger for immortality, and the Bible shows us the way that leads to life eternal. We are compassed about with sorrows, and God's Word imparts to us those messages of comfort for which our hearts are longing. Our souls need never go hungry, our questions unanswered, or problems unsolved,^{or} our hearts un comforted. We should avoid all idle questions, all vain musings, and confine our interests to those things which vitally affect our well-being both here and hereafter. We share Calvin's disgust for those who spend all their time searching the Scriptures for those things with which they have no possible concern, and all the while their souls are starving for the lack of spiritual nourishment. The Bible is amply sufficient for all those things for which it was intended.

However, at times we feel that Calvin has exalted Scripture to the detriment of Christian experience. Holy Scripture is not so sufficient that one can go without personal experiences of God. It is well and proper that we read of other men's experiences of the Father, but we will be robbing ourselves of untold blessings if we do not enter into these experiences ourselves. God is just as ready to reveal Himself to us, to speak to us, to make us conscious of His nearness, as He was to do these things for the men of other days. One fruit of the Protestant Reformation was the conviction of free access to God. No more should pope or priest intervene; the veil which guarded the holy of holies had been taken away and the priesthood

of believers became a reality. From the very beginning, Christianity was a glorious relationship between God in Christ and the believing soul, and to the end of the day it must remain so. The reading of a Book, regardless of its value, can never be a ^{tute} ~~sunsti~~ for direct companionship with our Heavenly Father.

(j) GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

We hesitate to class Calvin as an obscurantist, and yet many of his attitudes seem to justify such a classification. Having once formulated his dictation theory of inspiration, he guarded it with almost nervous anxiety. He gives us the impression that the integrity of God, the cause of Protestantism, and the general well-being of the Church depended largely upon keeping this theory intact. And while we do not censure him for defending his own doctrine, we must charge him with being an enemy of the science of biblical criticism. It is well to note that he was thorough and painstaking in his own investigations and was himself a biblical critic of no mean ability, yet at the same time he did not extend this right to others - certainly not to the extent of permitting them to voice their conclusions as boldly and freely as he had done. He was merciless in his denunciation of all those whose findings were different from his own and he felt no hesitance in labelling them with anything but complimentary names. It was impossible for scriptural knowledge to grow in an atmosphere of that sort.

It seems very strange to us that Calvin should have been so fearful about the trustworthiness of a book in which he seemed to have such profound confidence. If he really believed the Bible to be all that he claimed for it, what possible harm could come from minute investigation and the publication of honest opinions. Truth has been and always will be victorious, and its friends need not tremble for its safety.

It is a far cry from Reformation days to the times in which we now live, and during that period soul liberty has made much progress. We wish that Calvin might have lived to see the day when every man was left in peace with his Bible and his God. It is true that we have not yet passed beyond the stage where men upbraided one another for honest opinions, but such practice is at least looked down upon and deplored by the majority of Christians. We are certainly progressing toward the place where truth will be welcomed regardless of the source from which it comes, and we have long ago discovered that the success of Christianity is in no way bound up with the theory or theories of any man. The Word of God will outlive any treatment to which the Bible may have to submit, and the truths of Christianity are larger and nobler than any molds into which theologians have tried to pour them. No man has discovered everything that is worth knowing about the Bible and Christianity, and one of the glorious characteristics of our religion is its ability to give to the world a

continuous stream of fresh material as long as men will take the time and trouble to discover it. Let all men search the Scriptures and give to the world his findings, " for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it".¹

We are convinced, too, that Calvin made unjust demands of Scripture. He would decide upon infallibility, inerrancy, etc., and then declare that if Scripture could not meet these demands it was unworthy of his loyalty and devotion. When men began to find out that Scripture could not meet these demands, they began to lose faith in it, and thereby Calvin was defeating his own purpose. One of the most striking examples of this was his demand that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus be constructed as history:

"Let us now speak of the history of the rich man and Lazarus, who after the sufferings of this life was carried into Abraham's bosom, but the rich man into hell. Are these dreams and fables? But to escape the force of this argument, our antagonists answer, this was only a parable. I beg them, however, to adduce a single example from Scripture where a man is mentioned by his proper name in a parable. What do these words signify? 'There was a man whose name was Lazarus.' The Word of God must be a lie, or this is a true relation".²

And as for the grammatical errors which Calvin would deny, one had well said that "God never intended to teach men

¹ Acts v:38,39

² Henry: Life and Times of John Calvin, pp. 43-45

grammar by a supernatural process".¹

Calvin's interpretation of difficult passages of Scripture shows us the problems which he created for himself by his theory of inspiration. When he comes to a passage like that dealing with the hardening of Pharaoh's heart by God, Calvin can only say that God's ways are past finding out. Such interpretations led him to attribute David's threatenings against his enemies as the threatenings of the Holy Spirit. "As David spoke only as he was moved by the Holy Spirit", said Calvin in one place, "this imprecation must be received as if God Himself should thunder from His celestial throne".² Any theory of Scripture must needs become very distasteful to the Christian mind when it leads to interpretations of this sort.

Nor was Calvin consistent with himself. In some passages of his works he discusses portions of the Bible as though they were the writings merely of men,³ while in most others he boldly declares the Holy Spirit to be dictating every single word. In one passage of Scripture he would take everything literally,⁴ and in another he would suggest a figurative meaning.⁵ It all depended on how he wished it to be interpreted and what he wished it to mean.

Calvin's great weakness was not that he was too scriptural, but that he was not scriptural enough. To be

¹ Guizot : St. Louis and Calvin, P. 183

² Commentary on Psalm cix.16

³ Commentary on Hebrews ii.7

⁴ Henry: Life and Times of John Calvin, pp 43-45

⁵ Tracts Vol. 11, p.433

truly scriptural, one must take Scripture as it is; give to its message its obvious meaning; see its deliverances from the writer's point of view; and claim no more for it than it claims for itself. To try to make history out of a parable is not being loyal to Scripture. It is being unfair with it. It is being unscriptural. To take a highly figurative passage and give it a literal interpretation is to distort truth and invite difficulty. To attribute the vindictive threats of an oriental king to the Holy Spirit of God is to border on blasphemy and to misrepresent God. The more we honor God's Word, the more careful we should be to let it speak for itself. For centuries it has been bound by traditions and the insistent theories of its avowed friends. It will only fulfill its purpose in the world when it is given free rein and allowed to make its appeal to the hearts and consciences of men on the basis of its true nature.

FINIS

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